

# BACK TO SHAKESPEARE

HERBERT MORSE













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BY

HERBERT MORSE

B.A. OXON. AND LINCOLN'S INN BARRISTER-AT-LAW

AUTHOR OF "WHERE DO WE COME FROM?"

“Peace hath her victories  
No less renown'd than War: new Foes arise  
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.  
Help us to save free conscience from the paw  
Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw.”  
MILTON.

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# BACK TO SHAKESPEARE

## CHAPTER I

### PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

DR JOHNSON, *more suo*, once gave utterance to the monumental observation, that no man ever wrote a book except for money. The underlying thought in his mind was probably the thought that obsesses and distresses all would-be authors, and which they all alike experience, namely, is any remuneration but hard cash and plenty of it, an adequate reward for all the labour, anxiety, toil, and care that even a very trifling publication entails?

If Dr Johnson lived in these days he would have had to reverse or greatly modify his dictum — for books are as cheap and abundant as blackberries — and say that no one but a very foolish and inexperienced person would ever expect to make money out of a book. Indeed it is proverbially as difficult to turn pen and ink into cash as it is to extract gold from the sea.

Byron found it necessary even in his day when books were comparative rarities, to warn one of his contemporaries on this very point. He adjures him — Amos Cottle by name, — to avoid the risks, and abandon the attempt altogether:—

“Oh! Amos Cottle for a moment think,  
What meagre profits spring from pen and ink.”

And if there is but little cash to be obtained, there is possibly less credit; on the contrary, one stands to lose both, if one possesses even a little of either.

"Oh that mine enemy would write a book," was the observation of an astute, if cynical, man of the world, paraphrasing presumably Job's cry of agony, "Oh that mine adversary had written a book." So the cash and the credit must be left to take care of themselves. But apart from these there are certain minor compensations.

An author is in very much the same position as an angler, and goes through much the same anxieties and experiences. He has to bait his line skilfully, and wait patiently for a rise; if the fish fail to respond in some waters, let him rebait his hook and try his luck again in some other locality.

This is a somewhat long and tedious process, but so is fishing, and yet there are some natures that enjoy fishing more than any pastime in the world.

But apart from compensation pecuniary or otherwise, there is to some minds a real pleasure and satisfaction in the arrangement and composition of words, and in the endeavour to discover the most suitable ones to capture and fix, any particular thought, especially when one is discussing the greatest of all masters of the English tongue, and endeavouring to follow on, appreciate, and appropriate, if one can, something at any rate, however small, of his method and power of manipulation.

And, after all, is not true poetry for its own sake, better than fine gold? What does Professor Palgrave say of it, in the introduction to his famous anthology, "The Golden Treasury": "Poetry gives treasures 'more golden than gold,' leading us in higher and

healthier ways than those of the world, and interpreting to us the lessons of Nature."

But the author has an object in view as well—and he hopes a laudable one—in venturing to submit this little criticism to the public, and that is to open up, advertise, and discover to those of his fellow-countrymen who have never been at the pains to explore it, a very wonderful, intellectual soil, rich alike in minerals and general fertility, and to induce those who have merely glanced at it and passed by, imagining perhaps that it was too heavy, inaccessible, and possibly superior to their wants, to re-visit and gaze upon it once more. If they do, their hesitation will be amply rewarded, a new vista will open up before their eyes, and a beautiful and very wonderful picture will disclose itself. For all is there; love and passion, wit and humour, history and declamation, soliloquy, moving accidents, and tragedies by flood and field, almost everything that can be visually discovered, either in nature or in man, that the mind can conceive or the heart desire.

And here let it be stated at once that the author has no intention, even if he were capable of doing so, of writing a work, after the manner of Professor Dowden, on the "Mind and Art" of Shakespeare. The Professor's work is doubtless one of great thought, depth, and power, and his criticism on the "Art" of Shakespeare, at any rate, entitled to every respect; but when one trenches on the "mind" of another, and endeavours, so to speak, to locate fix and interpret it, one is treading on dangerous and uncertain ground, however great may be one's powers of criticism and intuition. It must be so from the very nature of the case, "*Quot sententiæ tot homines*" — there are as many opinions as there are men — and the character

and writings of one man will never present themselves to, and affect two others, in precisely the same way. The higher are the powers, and the greater the personality of the critic, the more likely is he to project his own mind into the mind of the person criticised, and to confound the one with the other.

Again, the reader must be reminded that this work is not intended for professed Shakespearian critics and scholars; they can teach the writer more than he can teach them, nor for that numerous though relatively small class of habitual readers and devotees of Shakespeare and his works, who are well able to take care of themselves and need no guidance from any one.

But outside this charmed circle, though one cannot dogmatise on the point, as no adequate data exist from which accurate deductions can be drawn, there is undoubtedly a very large class of highly educated men, who hardly know a line of the writings of the greatest of their fellow-countryman.

One sometimes wonders how this can be; but the reason possibly is not far to seek, and may be attributed to two causes.

It seems strange, but it is true, and quite in keeping with the English character, that the teaching of the works of the greatest writer of any age or country are entirely neglected, or relegated to a very inferior position indeed in all the great schools and universities of the very land that gave him birth.

Future generations will probably look back with amazement and wonder, and ask how such a system could have been permitted, and could have endured for so long.

How, they will ask themselves, could a country like England, so bigoted and determined in its national

characteristics and idiosyncrasies, with all its love of compromise, actuality, and the concrete, of which Shakespeare is the greatest exponent, have permitted its teachers to continue, generation after generation, year by year, and year in and year out, drilling, and that almost at the point of the bayonet into the minds and bodies of its youth, composed for the most part of reluctant, unwilling, and unappreciative recipients, the difficult and often obscure pages of the writings of antiquity, and yet neglect to impart even the most superficial acquaintance with the works of their own great fellow-countryman, whose shoes' latchet, no ancient writer, when taken alone, is worthy even to unloose.

The big guns of the classical conclave may boom and thunder as they will, and exalt and expatiate on the literary wonders of old time, but it is more than doubtful—regarded, of course, from the standpoint of literature alone, and apart from any information and knowledge of the ancient world that they may impart—that if “Shakespeare” were obliterated at the expense of the rest, the world would be the richer for the exchange.

They talk very grandly of Homer. Well, admitting that Homer in imaginative and creative power is the equal of Shakespeare, he is his equal in quality alone but not in development. He more nearly resembles some magnificent boy in the childhood of the world of letters, who in maturity of thought in no way approaches the measure of the stature of Shakespeare himself.

But there is another reason though possibly a subordinate one, why Shakespeare is so much neglected, and that is the unappetising way in which until recently his works were usually presented to the public. They

were either published in large and expensive editions of many volumes, quite beyond the reach of most people, or in stout, tight-volumes, in double columns of small print, after the manner of the excellent "Globe" edition. What was wanted and what is now partially supplied, was the plays of Shakespeare printed separately in cheap form, after the manner of the "Tauchnitz" edition, produced at Leipzig in 1868.

But outside and beyond the two classes above referred to there is yet another and a larger class still, and perhaps a more important one, or one that will be more important as time goes on, that large body of hard-headed, intelligent, but half-educated working-men, for whom the much criticised general education of the age, if it has done nothing else, has at least stimulated their curiosity as to what is going on around them in all directions, and in no direction perhaps more than in that of literature itself.

For it must be remembered that the world is entering on a new era, education, whether for good or evil, has come to stay, and is advancing by leaps and bounds. Men's eyes, yes, and women's eyes too, like those of Adam and Eve in the garden of old, are beginning to realise that they are naked intellectually as well as in other ways. They are looking around with re-awakened curiosity, and wondering in what garments, intellectual and otherwise, they shall clothe themselves.

Well, with what better raiment could they possibly provide themselves, to begin with at any rate, than with that furnished by the greatest of their countrymen Shakespeare himself.

Back to Shakespeare from much of the sordid, shallow, and paltry literature of the day, is every bit as essential to the well-being and health of the individual mind, as back to the country, from the squalor and contraction

of town life, is to the physique of the frequently worn out, broken, and disordered bodies of many of our town population.

The air of Shakespeare is invigorating, life-giving, and bracing, and a magnificent intellectual stimulant and tonic. It is nutritive and wholesome, and the grain whereby a man may live may be found therein. Whereas the current literature of the day, on which the lower classes delight to regale themselves, if reports be true, is somewhat towney and fetid, and does not even consume its own smoke, but disperses its inky vapours over all the surrounding land.

Shakespeare is never towney ; he is central it is true, but his circle has an all-embracing and almost infinite circumference.

For the popular literature of the day—and this is corroborated and vouched for in many quarters—is anything but what it should be, and far from what it might be, in temper, taste, and tone. Listen to what a celebrated canon of the English Church recently said upon the subject:—

“I suppose no thoughtful person can regard with satisfaction the wave of morbid sensationalism that has crept over the national consciousness, creating an art, if one can call it so, which is full of intense vulgarity from which all true art is always and inevitably free, and which moves in a wholly different sphere, from that which gives us the phrases and situations of *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, or *Romeo and Juliet*.

“You take up a leading journal, and you find there a whole column of large print descriptive of the last new play—a play so incomparably silly and sordid in plot and persons that you wonder how anybody could be found to write or to describe it.

“You take up the modern novel, good, bad, or



indifferent, and it is so obsessed with the glamour or the tragedy of sex, that it assumes that nothing else is of interest to the average man or woman."

If this impeachment is true—and the censure is probably rather under than over the mark—what better could the multitude do than go back to Shakespeare, and wash and refresh themselves in his invigorating waters!

If a man will not believe another, let him make the experiment for himself, for there are medicinal properties in Shakespeare, for the body as well as for the mind.

So many people, when they are miserable, hard hit, and down in their luck as the saying is, betake themselves, if they betake themselves to books at all, to what they call consoling literature, that is, a literature for the time being like-minded with themselves, which sympathises with their sufferings, and nurses their sorrow. But this surely is a mistake, it only inflames and keeps open the wound. They read, let us say, poems like *The Hound of Heaven*, by Thomson, or *The Everlasting Mercy*, by Masfield, which may, or may not be, the outpourings of genius, but which are intense and morbid to a degree, are very depressing, and create in one the feeling of approaching dissolution: whereas Shakespeare is nearly always optimistic, virile, and buoyant; the very abundance and excess of his vitality imparts itself, unconsciously though it may be, to the reader himself.

What the great Dr Johnson would have made of much of the latter-day literature one trembles to think. He wielded a heavy and relentless bludgeon, and spared no writer, great or small. He invariably discovered the weak points in a man's literary armour, and exposed them with merciless severity.



Dr Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" has received high praise from many exalted quarters, but notwithstanding its many excellencies one can never quite rid oneself of the feeling that Dr Johnson was hardly the right person to handle with sufficient delicacy and care, the more subtle effusions of the human soul.

He was no tender wet-nurse, and a sucking poet on presenting his efforts must have trembled at what reception they would meet with at his hands. "Trash, sir, dig potatoes," would have been as likely a verdict as any other.

But Johnson had for the most part to deal with virile writers, many of them his intellectual equals, and not a few of them his superiors in genius; men who wrote because their whole being was in their work, and because they had, or thought they had, a message to deliver to mankind. Whereas most of the literature of the day, outside, of course, journalism, technical works, biographies, travels, and so forth, is obviously faked and artificial, written merely to tickle the ears and excite the passions of the groundlings, and with the avowed purpose of scraping up what little money there is to be scraped up, by such a doubtful and very precarious commodity.

But notwithstanding Shakespeare's wonderful gifts and the still more wonderful use he has made of them, it is doubtful if he is appreciated by his countrymen as he should be. The day of his popularity has yet to dawn, as dawn it surely will, using the word popularity in its widest and most democratic sense.

There are probably a hundred people who read "Dickens" to one who reads "Shakespeare," though Shakespeare's writings have a far greater and more varied range than those of Dickens, and as pure literature are on an incomparably higher plane.

The sale of his works is no criterion whatever of his popularity, as "Shakespeare" is regarded by most people as a sort of lay Bible, and an imperative possession for every man with any pretence to education. But how few people read him, still less study him, and make him their own! If they possess a copy of his works it lies on the table, or on the shelf, a piece of inert, dusty, and disregarded matter, to be referred to possibly on occasion to verify some quotation, or to fortify a paterfamilias and prevent him from displaying too crass an ignorance on an occasional excursion to the play.

One gentleman went even so far as to hazard the observation that he never read Shakespeare, as there were so many common sayings in him. Surely no greater compliment was ever paid to any writer.

The majority of writers and speakers hardly realise how great is the debt they owe him. They frequently quote him quite unconsciously, or if consciously never acknowledge the reference.

Let us take, as instances, four celebrated quotations by four very celebrated men. Were they aware when they made them, or were they not, to whom they were indebted for their smart sayings? Of course it is just possible though hardly likely, that the same ideas clothed in precisely the same words, might have presented themselves to the mind of each, independently of Shakespeare altogether.

The late Mr Gladstone's well-known phrase of bundling the Turks, "bag and baggage," out of Europe, will be within the recollection of every one. Shakespeare twice at least uses this very phrase. Once in *Winter's Tale* :—

"The enemy with bag and baggage,"

and again in *As You Like It* :—

"Though not with bag and baggage."

Lord Beaconsfield is reported to have said that in flattering royalty it was necessary to lay it on with a trowel. Celia, in *As You Like It*, makes use of a similar expression in her answer to Touchstone:—

“Well said, that was laid on with a trowel.”

Then again there is Mr Chamberlain’s celebrated “Long Spoon” speech. Mr Chamberlain in that speech is related to have said, “Who sups with the devil must have a long spoon.” This is taken from the *Comedy of Errors*:—

“*Dormio*. Marry, he must have a long spoon that must eat with the devil.”

The origin of this quotation greatly puzzled many people at the time, and was the subject of much discussion in the Press.

The fourth is one by the late Professor Huxley.

Huxley used to say that he would rather worship a wilderness of monkeys, than collective humanity, so Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*:—

“I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.”

And here before reaching the main body of the book and entering upon the details which must naturally accompany it, it may not be out of place to lay before the reader some of Shakespeare’s leading characteristics and merits, and a few also of the disabilities and limitations under which he suffers as a popular writer, and then to offer, merely by way of suggestion, the best method to pursue in reading Shakespeare, for the purpose of appreciating and understanding his works as a whole.

First and foremost then, by the admission of all, Shakespeare is primarily and essentially the poet of Nature.

Shakespeare in his treatment and description of

Nature does not fondle her with the gentle and caressing affection of a Wordsworth, who apparently experienced much the same satisfaction in contemplating Nature that a cat might feel when purring composedly before a kitchen fire. Nor does he display in his dealings with her that transcendental and ethereal delight which became Shelley so well. His love for her, though equally true, is more brilliant, virile, and direct. He does not interpret her so much from within, but regards her after his manner, almost invariably from without. In Shakespeare one rather misses that intimate and subtle connection between Nature and the soul of man for which Wordsworth is so conspicuous. In the former the communion is not so close, nor the amalgamation so complete. Shakespeare with all his great powers could possibly never have written the following lines, so complete is the union, and so perfect the harmony between the author and what he sets himself to portray:—

“The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her; and she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place.  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face.

“A slumber did my spirit seal  
I had no human fears  
She seem'd a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.  
No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees;  
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course  
With rocks, and stones, and trees.”

The disciples of Wordsworth and Shelley would probably deny that Shakespeare was a true poet at all. But Shakespeare is notwithstanding, a poet, and a very great poet indeed, though it must be admitted that after the manner of Wordsworth and Shelley he

is no poet of the soul, using the word "soul" in its larger sense, and not confining it to the spiritual nature of man, but meaning thereby that subtle appreciation of the mysteries of Nature, that feeling of awe, wonder, mystery, and apprehension that all men, even the hardest and most matter - of - fact, must at some moments of their lives experience — that realisation of an inner and mystic communion, between one's own individuality and the universe as a whole, and that participation in, and connection with, all created things. Shakespeare is no delineator of such feelings as these; he is essentially a realist, or a painter of the visible creation. In his sonnets it is true he is an idealist, but it is the idealism of the outer vision, rather than of the inner life.

Of course true poetry has nothing at all to do with verse, or the arrangement and metrical setting of the words. It can be written almost as beautifully in prose. All that metre and verse can do for it is to point its meaning, and attune it to the ear. The beauty of the thought resides in the prose; metre merely lends an additional charm when the metre is apt and appropriate to the thought. In the English tongue, at any rate, the book of Job is written entirely in prose, though it towers above all the poetry in the world.

Shakespeare casts his poetry in three moulds, or forms, the dramatic, the lyrical, and the sonnet, and it is difficult to say in which the result is most beautiful and effective.

His lyrics are delightful and unique of their kind. There is an airy and almost childlike charm about them which is perfectly bewitching. They are at times fragmentary and broken, and call to mind a spent dandelion flower floating with its seeds hither and thither in the summer air, and with the sunbeams playing upon and around it.

The dramatic form of course is more formal, but well suited for theatrical and rhetorical declamation, and is usually expressed in blank verse, a sort of cross between prose and poetry, or poetry that does not rhyme.

Shakespeare was not the originator, as Dryden asserts, of this method of expression, though one of the first to adopt it; the distinction of originating it belongs to Marlowe, one of the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors.

It is a method of expression well adapted to certain sorts of dramatic writing. While it relieves the ear of the monotonous jingle of perpetual rhyme, it at the same time lends spirit and condensation to the otherwise unrestrained liberty of pure prose, and tends to put a check on undue license and verbosity.

Shakespeare, then, is the poet of Nature, and the poet of human action and passion in its most virile and realistic moods.

He is not primarily or essentially the poet of Love. Indeed "love" in almost all his great historical plays is conspicuous by its absence, or only plays a very subordinate part. Love, between the sexes, is in them almost ignored, and what there is in them of love and marriage is for the most part courtly and formal, and a matter of *convenience*. It is the match-making of kings and queens, of lords and ladies, due rather to political and social necessity, than to the promptings of the heart.

Again in most of the great tragedies, such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Julius Cæsar*, and the like, there is little of love to be discovered.

*Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* are not properly love poems at all, but wonderful and very vivid portrayals of the power of lust over the nature of man.

No one has contrasted the nature of the two with more felicity and power than Shakespeare himself.

“Call it not love, for love to heaven is fled,  
Since sweating Lust on earth usurp'd his name :  
Under whose simple semblance he hath fed  
Upon fresh beauty, blotting it with blame ;  
Which the hot tyrant stains, and soon bereaves,  
As caterpillars do the tender leaves.

“Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,  
But Lust's effect is tempest after sun ;  
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain,  
Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done ;  
Love surfeits not, Lust like a glutton dies :  
Love is all truth, Lust full of forgèd lies.”

And no man can depict with greater beauty and truth, love, in its higher manifestations.

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds  
Or bends with the remover to remove :  
O, no ! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken ;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickles compass come ;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error, and upon me proved  
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.”

But Shakespeare can draw, and has drawn, many beautiful love scenes and interviews, with as deft, delicate, and perfect a pen as any poet of them all.

There are lovers of every variety, differing in age, appearance, character, and disposition, Benedick and Beatrice, Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Desdemona, Orlando and Rosalind, Leonatus and Imogen, and a host of others ; all different types, and all conducting themselves under the influence of this passion, agreeably to their natures and surroundings.



Perhaps the climax of beauty in the description of adolescent love is reached in the balcony scene between Romeo and Juliet. But Shakespeare in this last play has made, to English ears at any rate, a rather unaccountable error. He fixes the age of Juliet at fourteen years, or under. Now no man, or no youth, unless his nature were abnormal or diseased, would have committed suicide for a girl of such tender years. It is not quite true to Nature, but of course it is immaterial, as one can imagine Juliet at any age one pleases.

But Love, sexual or otherwise, does not, and cannot from the very nature of the case, occupy the whole life of man, and Shakespeare's brain was far too active, virile, and varied, to let it come entirely under the dominion of that, or of any other passion or emotion.

As Dr Johnson, when discussing Shakespeare in his "Lives of the Poets," very justly observes:—

"Upon every other stage the universal agent is Love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with opposition of interest, and harass them with violence of desires with each other; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered; is the business of modern dramatists. For this, probability is violated, life misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions; and as it has no great influence on the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion as it was,



regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity."

Nor does Shakespeare in his study and portrayal of Nature confine himself to the great outlines, sweeps, and effects, so dear to the mind of the poet. When detail is necessary for the perfection of his art, and when purpose and inspiration prompt him, he can, as far as visual observation will carry him, analyse any object, whether animate or inanimate, with close and accurate detail and discernment. What more perfect picture of the stallion was ever drawn than that in *Venus and Adonis*? Its movements, its quality, its high breeding, nay, even its anatomy, are all noted and delineated with an unerring pen.

Or again, turn to the description of the bee and its habits, to be found in *Henry V.*:—

"Obedience ; for so work the honey bees,  
Creatures that, by a rule in nature, teach  
The act of order to a peopled kingdom.  
To have a king, and officers of sorts ;  
Where some, like magistrates, correct at home,  
Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad,  
Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings  
Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds ;  
Which pillage they with merry march bring home  
To the tent-royal of their emperor ;  
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys  
The singing masons building roofs of gold ;  
The civil citizens kneading up the honey ;  
The poor mechanic porters crowding in  
Their heavy burdens at his narrow gate ;  
The sad-ey'd justice with his surly hum,  
Deliv'ring o'er to executors pale  
The lazy yawning drone."

The above description has been demurred to by some critics on the grounds of its biological inaccuracy, one notable one going so far as to declare that there is a mistake in every other line.

From the point of view of natural history, there very probably is. But Shakespeare was no naturalist ;

he uses the eye alone, and by the eye he must stand or fall. As a piece of mere visual and poetic portraiture, the picture is not only elaborate but true. The knowledge of natural history had not in Shakespeare's days reached its present stage of development, and the observation is rather a reflection on the sympathy and judgment of the critic, than on the fallibility of the poet.

But this power of depicting Nature in a poetic garb and with such accurate felicity is not the only gift, and possibly not even the greatest of this myriad-minded man. The immensity and balance of his mind, his range of thought, to say nothing of his powers of direct, apposite, and varied observation, fill one almost with awe, and are quite equal to, if they do not surpass his imagination as a poet.

Yet another great quality which he possesses in common with his countrymen, and which should peculiarly endear him to them is his love of the visible and of concrete reality: in this respect he is one of the most complete and perfect exponents of the Anglo-Saxon mind. He has all an Englishman's love of hard fact, and his hatred of ideas. The average Englishman, if he hates anything, hates an idea, especially if that idea happens to be a new one. In this the English mind presents a complete contrast to the French, which is cast in precisely the opposite mould, it loves abstract ideas with an intensity which other nations can scarcely realise. Professor Dowden calls this trait in Shakespeare "a noble positiveness."

For the discussion and portrayal of psychological problems, as they are now understood, Shakespeare as far as his works reveal him, had but little taste or inclination. His treatment of psychology is purely elementary, and well within the experience and observation of all, but into the interior analysis of human

character he refrains from entering. He preferred the outside to the inside—in other words, synthesis to analysis—whereas the taste and tendency of to-day is all in the opposite direction. People can hardly be brought to read or regard with patience any character that is not turned inside out, and upside down, or that is not possessed of some abnormal peculiarities the resultant of certain strange and unusual psychological conditions.

The outside of a man is not always what it should be; is the inside any better, or more worthy of exploitation? Shakespeare understood human nature pretty well, and apparently came to the conclusion that it was not.

Shakespeare has yet another great qualification as a writer which should especially commend itself to an age proverbially in a hurry, and impatient of discussion. He is never unduly verbose on the one hand, or unduly argumentative on the other. In his own words, he never allows:—

“The thread of his verbosity to outrun the staple of his argument.”

So many writers are all clothes and no body, or all body and no clothes. But Shakespeare's body, that is, the “staple of his argument,” is firm, well-knit, and powerful, and he clothes it invariably, though he changes the dress many times, in garments often beautiful, and always becoming and appropriate.

He can hit off a thought, and make sparks fly from it, in words the most vivid and exact. He reminds one of some master-smith at his forge, who waits till the heat of the iron is precisely at the right temperature for the occasion, and then delivers his blow with no great apparent effort or skill—though both are there, and more in reserve—until the metal is forged and welded to a turn, and brilliant sparks fly out in all

directions, upwards, outwards, and downwards, and compel the attention of the beholder.

And so it is with Shakespeare, whenever the power of his thought strikes the heat of his emotion, a brilliant illumination is the result.

Truly he has many qualities to recommend him to the least educated of his countrymen, and reflects in his own person and writings many of their best qualities and idiosyncrasies. Sprung from the very heart of England, he is bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh.

His language is direct and simple, rarely involved and obscure. Some passages in his works may not be immediately apparent, there may be difficulties and obscurities here and there, but they are usually to be attributed to some flaw or misprint in the folio, or to some confusion and uncertainty as to their proper rendering on the part of innumerable editors, annotators, and scribes, rather than to any obliquity in the vision of Shakespeare himself, or any want of capacity for self-expression.

Where else will you look for or discover, in times ancient or modern, in this country or in that, in poetry or in prose, such a wonderful ear for the music and disposition of words. In this respect contrasted with Shakespeare, Browning is but a sorry and bungling juggler. How inharmonious, let alone unpoetical, some of Browning's best known aphorisms can be, let one quotation suffice to disclose:—

“God's in His heaven, all's right with the world.”

The saying is a favourite one with the clergy, who frequently quote it from the pulpit with great unction and approval. The main idea is doubtless true. But is it all right with the world? If it were, the observation is entirely uncalled for. Again, “in His heaven”—

could anything be more atrocious than that? Heaven might be some superior flat in a London mansion. Compare this saying of high-sounding wisdom, and pretence, with a precisely similar idea when rendered by the Psalmist:—

“The Lord sitteth above the waterflood, and the Lord remaineth a king for ever,”

and how poor and unworthy does Browning’s rendering appear.

Shakespeare, as has been stated, labours under certain disabilities and disadvantages, which are a drag on his popularity, and a hindrance to his being generally read, or at any rate read and appreciated as he should be, by the vast mass of the community.

In the first place his works were written for the stage, and are necessarily cast in a dramatic form. Now, perhaps, no form of literature is more tedious and trying to sit down and read in cold blood than the dramatic. There are hundreds of people who would far rather read the worst novel, than the best drama ever written.

Nor are they altogether without reason. With dramatic characters one has no time to become intimately acquainted; their language is necessarily condensed, and only their salient features and situations touched upon. They are usually types, and one cannot rejoice very greatly over the successes of a type, or weep very copiously over its misfortunes. Whereas in the novel all is different, and greatly to the advantage of the author. Take an author like Dickens, in his way a very great writer indeed. One has time, so to speak, to make oneself at home with all his characters, to become accustomed to all their little ways and humours, to appreciate their merits and defects, and to love or hate them as the case

may be. Whereas with Shakespeare who wields a far more varied and powerful pen, this is not the case; he is handicapped, and heavily handicapped, by time, space, and opportunity.

But Shakespeare largely reduces the handicap, and equalises the balance, though he cannot entirely redress it, by life, action, and condensation. All his characters are active, and on the move, they are numerous and varied, and speak with a point, force, and condensation discoverable in no other writer in the world.

His writings are really too great to be imprisoned in any form whatever, or to be confined to any particular metre; and one might add to Dr Johnson's advice with advantage, not only entirely to disregard all critics and annotators in reading Shakespeare until you have thoroughly assimilated his spirit and appreciated his excellencies, but to disregard the setting altogether, and read his works throughout as if they were prose—which, by the way, large parts of them are—and then, little by little, and more and more, will dawn on the reader, the immensity of the man, and the immeasurable grandeur of his mind.

And not only does Shakespeare suffer in the reading, but he suffers in the acting also. It is strange, but as a rule it may be taken as true, that the better written a piece is, the worse it acts, and *vice versa*.

Shakespeare's plays have been presented by many great actors, and elocutionists; they never enhance, but almost invariably detract from the power and beauty of the written word.

Nor is the fault always, if at all, on the side of the actors and elocutionists, for to realise as one should and assimilate to oneself, the real power, and true flavour and relish of his works, one must have time

for reflection. Speech is too hurried a medium to allow his full meaning to soak into the mind, and in the hearing and seeing only, much of its merit disappears through the sieve, and is lost either in the splendour of the upholstery, the beauty of the dresses, or in general and inevitable distraction of the whole.

But Shakespeare's popularity suffers from another cause. He has been ear-marked — so many people imagine—as a classic, and appropriated by the intellectuals, and therefore, so they think, beyond their reach. And once give the people to understand that a book is for the high-brows, and favoured by them alone, and they will — especially in these days of excitement, hurry, and unrest—flee from it as it were a pestilence, and avoid it altogether.

The words, "scholar" and "critic," have an almost terrifying effect on many people, and encourage them to keep their distance. But let them not be afraid, for after all what constitutes a scholar? The word "scholar," so the dictionaries and other authorities inform us, is derived from a Greek word *σχολη*, meaning "leisure," and the word "scholar" means a person whose circumstances are so favourable that they enable him to have sufficient leisure to cultivate his character and understanding, usually through the medium of a variety of tongues.

Now there are two kinds of scholars. The scholar of the letter and the scholar of the spirit. The scholar of the letter pure and simple is a mere pedant, devoted exclusively to the manipulation, arrangement, and classification of words. For any use that he is to himself or anybody else, he might as well occupy his time in playing Patience, or manipulating Chinese puzzles. At the old universities he used to, and probably does still, flourish and abound. To him the end and aim



of all learning, nay, even of existence itself, was to write down in one language or another some brilliant metrical exercise, perfect in its accuracy of accent and composition, and if one were unequal to this particular piece of juggling, one was, in the eye of that pedant, outside the pale altogether, and hardly worthy of a back-seat in the ranks of educated men.

But there is another and a very different class of scholar, the scholar of the spirit—that is, the scholar who loves books for their own sake and for the instruction and beauty to be derived from them, and who likes to acquire and appropriate to himself, what is best in the writings of others. He likes their thoughts to soak into his thoughts, and to recognise their feelings in his own. This kind of scholar really lives and grows. By constant reading either in one language or in many he can gauge the value of a book almost at a glance, and can rip out, as it were, its contents, and extract its life blood, in a space of time that would appear almost incredible to another. The knowledge of many languages is not essential to him, for he soon discovers that though there are many tongues among men, there is but one for the immortals.

So let no man be frightened by the word “scholar.” Indeed, so little of a scholar was Shakespeare himself that he did not even know how to spell his own name; but in this he was not peculiar, for many eminent authorities spell it differently, and the correct and appropriate letters that make up the immortal word have yet to be decided on.

Collier spells it “Shakespeare,” Professor Dowden “Shaksper,” and the Globe edition “Shakspeare.” So much for scholarship!

And how about the great army of annotators, revisers,



amenders of texts, and so forth? They, of course, have their uses. They preserve, keep clean, and explain to the best of their ability, the original intent and meaning of an author, and preserve his work from interpolation and defilement; but even they, though useful, are by no means essential to a right understanding of the original.

Perhaps all have heard the story of the gentleman who once presented an old lady with a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress," edited and annotated by himself. On a subsequent interview he asked her what she thought of his effort. "Well," she answered, "I always thought I understood my 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and I hope to understand your notes in time."

There are doubtless many words in Shakespeare that are obsolete and obscure. Some may have been dying words when he used them; some may have been coined, *ad hoc*, by Shakespeare himself, and have perished, and dropped out of the language when there was no further use for them; others, again, may be mere words of locality and technique, and therefore no longer survive. But any reader of ordinary understanding really needs but little assistance in this way; the surrounding context nearly always throws sufficient light on almost any word to make its meaning fairly intelligible.

Then how should Shakespeare be read?

Dr Johnson, with his usual sound, common sense, points out the way, and if we would get the best out of Shakespeare, it is perhaps the true, and in the end shortest, method to pursue.

"Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils. Let him that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every

play from the first scene to the last, with the utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged, let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of Theobald, and of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness, and read the commentators.

“Particular passages are cleared by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principal subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book which he has too diligently studied.

“Parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed; there is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design, and in its true proportions; a close approach shows the smaller niceties, but the beauty of the whole is discerned no longer.”

It is true Shakespeare's language is at times coarse and needlessly obscene, but even here, true to his own nature and the English character, it is always direct and never seductive, and may be attributed either to the language of his age, to his own love of fidelity, or to his lowly origin, or possibly to a mixture of all three: but as a rule so beautiful, simple, and direct is it, that the wayfaring man, and even the fool, need hardly err therein.

His day, as has been said, especially among his own countrymen, as a popular writer is yet to dawn. Taken as a whole, the English here, as elsewhere, true to their

character, largely neglect and disregard the works of the greatest writer of them all.

The resident of London, it has been said, knows less of his great city than even the occasional visitor. In the same way a native born Englishman possibly knows less of Shakespeare than his cousins in America, Germany, and the Colonies.

And yet Shakespeare to the Englishman of the day should be the very poet they desire. His works are for all men, and for all time, because they treat of the universal and elementary passions of human nature, and decipher and depict with unerring instinct and power, the lives, feelings, needs, and aspirations of the ordinary individual man. The age, it has been said, is a materialistic one; well, Shakespeare is materialistic too, that is to say, he concentrates on living matter and hard realities, and he sees and represents things as they really are, and as they really do occur. To say this, is in no way to disparage Shakespeare, or to cast an indirect slur on the inner nature of his mind.

The word "materialistic" is used here not in contradistinction to the "spirit," but merely as showing a preference for the concrete, in actual and visible embodiment.

Shakespeare is no inspirer, and no prophet, and he has no one message in particular to deliver to mankind.

Lovers of theology, psychology, and abstract speculation must find their satisfaction elsewhere; Shakespeare confines himself to this present world, and never knocks his head against the walls of the universe. At times he seems almost on the point of raising the veil, and letting us in some measure into the secret of his own ideas on the mysteries of the universe, and of life; but

he drops it almost instantly again, and returns once more to reality.

And for this reason, and apparently for this reason alone, Shakespeare has been dubbed a pagan, and charged with a hard materialism. But this surely is unfair to Shakespeare. Because a man keeps silence on any given subject, he is not necessarily unmindful of or indifferent to it. Nay, he may feel the more, and hesitate to commit himself to, or handle mysteries beyond his powers of apprehension and explanation. As Professor Dowden very truly observes:—

“The infinite of meditation, and the infinite of passion, both these lay within the range of Shakespeare’s experience and Shakespeare’s art. He does not indeed come forward with an explanation of the mysteries of existence, perhaps because he felt more than other men their mysteriousness.”

Shakespeare, of course, had his limitations; he was human like the rest of us, but within his limitations no greater than he has arisen, or perhaps is ever likely to arise.

“The voyaging spirit of man cannot remain within the enclosure of any one age or any single mind. We need to supplement the noble positivism of Shakespeare with an element not easy to describe or define, but none the less actual, which the present century has demanded as essential to its spiritual life and well-being.”

And it is possible that under other conditions with a new outlook, and with the advance and growth of the human mind, a greater even than Shakespeare may appear to voice and illustrate the life of a distant, and it may be, more exalted humanity.

The lessons to be derived from Shakespeare, both direct and indirect, are many and varied, but the sum of the whole has never been more felicitously or truth-

fully summed up than by Mr Walter Bagehot in the following passage :—

“ If this world is not all evil, he who has understood and painted it best, must probably have some good. If the almighty and underlying essence of the world be good, then it is likely that the writer who most deeply approached to that essence, will be himself good. There is a religion of week-days, as well as of Sundays, a religion of ‘cakes and ale,’ as well as of pews and altar cloths. This England lay before Shakespeare as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedge-rows, and its many trees, and its great towns and its endless hamlets, and its motley society and its long history, and its bold exploits, and its gathering power; and he saw that they were good. To him perhaps more than to any one else has it been given to see, that they were a great unity, a great religious object; that if you could only descend to the inner life, to the deep things, to the secret principle of its noble vigour, to the essence of character . . . we might, so far as we are capable of so doing, understand the nature which God has made. Let us think of him, not as a teacher of dry dogmas or a sayer of hard sayings, but as

“ ‘ A priest to us all  
Of the wonder and bloom of the world  
A teacher of the hearts of men and women.’ ”

As regards the arrangement of the following pages the author claims for them a certain sequence and chronological order, though he is painfully aware that there is a lack of proportion and unity in the whole. To present a book to the public perfect in this respect, would be an arduous task, beyond his powers of adaptability and condensation, unless the book were drawn out to an inordinate length.

The method adopted is as follows. The first chapters are devoted to the little we know of Shakespeare the

man, and the nature and character of his age and his position in it. Those following immediately are largely occupied with a discussion of Hamlet, Shakespeare's greatest tragic, and Henry V., his greatest historic character. They both of them loom so large and are so attractive to all, that some reference to them was to the author, at any rate, irresistible, though they are rather thrust in and out of place and somewhat break in on the general arrangement.

Shakespeare's humour, wit, and satire are next discussed and illustrated from the plays of *Henry IV.*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *As You Like It*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, quoted and criticised at considerable though not inordinate length; as perhaps none of Shakespeare's plays illustrate and illuminate with greater brilliancy the lighter and more captivating side of his art. Certain selections are then taken from a variety of plays, and the volume concludes with some observations on *King Lear*, possibly the last great tragic outburst of the genius of Shakespeare.

It is like a loud and prolonged thunder-clap which winds up the storm and tempest of his mind. In *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, which in point of time are considered the last of Shakespeare's plays, we are in subsiding and calmer waters. They are remarkable and beautiful plays in their way, and reveal a spirit of gentleness, reconciliation, and forgiveness, qualities which are somewhat foreign to the writings of Shakespeare's fuller maturity and power. They are the expiring efforts of a great genius, already entering on its decline.

Having said so much by way of preface, if the gentle reader will now take the author by the hand he will introduce him at once to the man, William Shakespeare, himself.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MAN SHAKESPEARE

WHAT do we know of the man Shakespeare, the eldest son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, his wife, born at Stratford-on-Avon, 23rd April 1564?

Many people imagine, apart from what he wrote, that Shakespeare may be regarded almost as a mythical personage, but this idea is mistaken, and contrary to the facts as we know them.

It is true, that of his comings in and goings out, of his daily habits, of his intercourse with his fellows, of his personal appearance, and so forth, our information is but scanty and meagre.

But our knowledge about the man as distinguished from his personality, and apart from any inference that may be drawn from his writings, is, perhaps, larger and more intimate than many people imagine.

Until his nineteenth year our knowledge of him is traditional, and founded purely on conjecture.

Shakespeare probably received his early education at the free Grammar School of Stratford: but we are ignorant of when he went to school, and when he left it.

It has been asserted that in his early days he was a schoolmaster in the county; and again that he was employed in the office of an attorney, and both suggestions are sufficiently possible and plausible.

Indications of some legal training are to be found



in his plays, and many of his law terms and allusions are applied with much technical exactness and propriety. But this of itself hardly warrants the assertion that Shakespeare was ever an Attorney's clerk; at the best it is but a surmise, for Shakespeare was a many-sided genius, he was a practical man of affairs, as well as a great actor, playwright, and dramatic poet.

He was one of a great company of celebrated literary men. He lived, moreover, many years in London, and would naturally possess some acquaintance of the technical phraseology of all arts and professions.

The position he held as playwright and stage manager would have brought him into contact with many business transactions affecting his profession—and what more likely than that he should pick up some technical legal terms?—or they may even have been supplied to him by some lawyer of his acquaintance. Certainly he was possessed of a considerable stock of legal phraseology. For instance he makes Hamlet say in the churchyard scene—:

“ *Ham.* There's another; why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddits now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries: is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt. Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? ”

Once admit that because a man is a master of a few technical terms, he must therefore be a member of the profession to which those terms apply, and you can prove Shakespeare to have been a tinker, tailor, ploughboy, or sailor, or anything you will.

In his nineteenth year we have some reliable



information concerning him. In that year took place one of the most important events of his life, established on irrefragable testimony, his marriage with Ann Hathaway of Stratford, which took place at the end of the year 1582.

By her he had three children, a boy who died young, and two daughters, Susanna and Judith.

Susanna married a physician, Dr Hall, and left one child who died childless.

Judith married a Mr Quiney, and had three children, all of whom died before the age of twenty. So Shakespeare left no descendants, but bequeathed to the world what is far better, the rich inheritance of his fame.

Of his married life we know little, but it can hardly have been a happy one.

It would appear incredible that the greatest genius the world has ever known, with his appreciation of beauty, his comprehensive mind, and his intimate knowledge of the human heart could long have been satisfied or found any companionship with a mere country wench, whatever may have been her early and youthful attractions. Moreover, there are certain indications in his writings, as many critics have observed, which show that it was not, and which point directly to the evils resulting from the union of parties "misgraffed in respect of years."

In a well-known speech of the Duke to Viola, in *Twelfth Night*, we find the following:—

" Let still the woman take  
An elder than herself : so wears she to him ;  
So sways she level in her husband's heart :  
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,  
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won  
Than woman's are."

These lines precisely fit his own case, and it seems incredible that at the time he wrote them he had not the circumstances of his own marriage in his mind.

In his will he treats his wife with but scant respect : he refers to her after his daughter, in the following words, "I give unto my wife my said second-best bed with the furniture," and this is his only reference to her.

The "second best bed" rather suggests that he regarded his wife as of very secondary importance.

The second great event in his life occurs in the beginning of the year 1586, when he quits his home and family for London. There were probably several reasons that prompted him to this step. There is the old and well-known tradition that he got into trouble with the local authorities, and particularly with Sir Thomas Lucy, the Lord of the Manor of Chalcot, for stealing the deer in his park. There is strong evidence for the truth of this delinquency. Rowe, one of his contemporaries, in his "Life of Shakespeare," most distinctly asserts that he did. The incident is highly probable when we take into account the customs of those times, and the romantic and adventurous tendencies which such a high-spirited youth as Shakespeare was sure to possess.

But there were probably other and stronger reasons that urged him to the step. His family were in straitened circumstances ; there were no prospects for him in the narrow limits of his own village. He himself early declared that :—

"Homekeeping youth have ever homely wits," and with that consciousness of mental power which he must have possessed, he would naturally seek a wide field for its exercise.

And now may be said to have commenced that wonderful career, stranger than fiction, more enchant-

ing than fairyland, and more durable than brass. He stands on a pedestal, high above the writers of all time :—

“ He doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus.”

Like Ajax, defying the lightening of the skies, he defies the lightening of criticism, it merely glances off his armour, or leaves it brighter than before.

Shakespeare was not only an author, but himself an actor of considerable repute. Aubrey, a contemporary of his, and who imparts to us something of the little information we know concerning him, states that “he did act exceeding well.” Rowe, on the other hand, asserts that he was a very moderate performer.

That he was well acquainted with the theory of Art and the just proportions of theatrical declamation, the following speech of Hamlet shows:—

ACT III., Scene 2.

“ *Ham.* Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounce it to you, trippingly on the tongue ; but if you mouth it, as many of you players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus ; but use all gently : for in the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ear of the groundlings who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb show and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o’er doing Termagant ; it out-herods Herod, pray you avoid it. . . .

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor, suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature : for anything so overdone is far from the purpose of playing.

Whose end both at the first and now, was, and is to hold as ’twere, the mirror up to nature ; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pleasure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot

but make the judicious grieve ; the censure of which one, must, in your allowance, o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise and that highly : not to speak it profanely, that neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitate humanity so abominably."

The rules therein enumerated for public speaking could hardly be improved upon.

Shakespeare then went up to London, and attached himself to that great band of playwrights who numbered in their company many men of real genius at a time rather prior to the date of the erection of the Globe Theatre at Bankside, which was completed in the spring of the year 1905. The launching of this theatre, the largest hitherto built in London, may be regarded as the starting-point and foundation of the stage as we know it at this day.

Speaking roughly, prior to this date the drama as we now have it was unknown in England. Hitherto the people had to content themselves with such substitutes as "miracle plays," "moral plays," companies of strolling players, and so forth, if they wished for theatrical diversion.

Miracle plays were performed in various parts of England during a very long period. The critics who frown on, and treat with so much severity any attempt to reproduce biblical scenes on the stage, even if taken only from the Old Testament, seem quite oblivious of the fact that for many centuries they were the only admissible form of theatrical entertainment. They had their origin in Scripture history, and one of the characters, that of the Saviour, was common in productions of this class.

The building of the Globe was coincident in point of time with the appearance of two pieces of Shakespeare,

his *Venus and Adonis*, and *Lucrece*, both dedicated to his subsequent friend and patron the Earl of Southampton.

The *Venus and Adonis* Shakespeare himself called "the first heir of his invention." Collier tells us that "it was quite new of its class, being founded on no model either ancient or modern, and that it has all the marks of youthful vigour, strong passion, and luxuriant imagination:" and it may be regarded as the foundation of his fortune and reputation in more ways than one.

It drew from the Earl of Southampton by way of recognition the munificent gift of £1,000, equivalent to a sum of about £4,000 in these days, and doubtless it was this opportune gift that enabled Shakespeare to at once establish himself in London, and become a shareholder in the old Blackfriars Theatre on the banks of the Thames.

It freed him at a stroke from pecuniary care and the pinch of poverty, "hollow poverty and emptiness," and the anxiety engendered thereby, and under which his genius might have withered, or have been untimely blotted out.

The world perhaps owes more to this princely gift of the Earl of Southampton than it has hitherto been aware of, or recognised. Without it, it might have lost all Shakespeare's great subsequent achievements.

Where Shakespeare resided when he first came up to London is not known, but in July 1596 he was installed in a house at Southwark, perhaps to be close to the scene of action, and the more effectually to control the performances at the Globe.

He appears to have resided there during the remainder of his stay in London, which he left for

good in the year 1614. He returned to his native village of Stratford at the close of that year, and never for any lengthened period again left his native place.

"The latter part of his life," says Rowe, "was spent as all men of good sense would wish theirs to be, in ease, retirement, and the society of his friends."

He died on the 23rd April 1616, at the age of fifty-three, on the same day of the same month that he was born.

Of the cause and manner of his death but little is known. The legend that he died of hard drinking may be dismissed as an idle tale. Collier says: "That Shakespeare was of sober though of companionable habits we are thoroughly convinced; he could not have written 37 plays in twenty-five years had he been otherwise," and Shakespeare did not work by fits and starts, his work was fairly even and continuous all along the line.

As regards his personal appearance we have three quite reliable sources of information. First, his bust in the Church at Stratford-on-Avon, which certainly does not convey to the observer a man of great intellectual power and imagination. To be truthful it is somewhat coarse and commonplace, and might equally well have represented any yokel in the village.

It has no resemblance whatever to the celebrated Droeshout engraving, the work of Martin Droeshout on the title page of the folio of 1623. This engraving is probably a truer representation of the original than the celebrated bust. It can hardly be called a handsome face, if judged by conventional standards.

Another well-known portrait is the Chandos, from which the bust of the poet in Westminster Abbey is taken. It is not so well authenticated, nor has it the



individuality of the Droeshout picture, but it is probably the one best known, as it conforms more closely to the popular idea of what a poet should appear; but for that very reason it is probably not so true a representation, nor is it so remarkable a face as that depicted by Droeshout. In short, it has the appearance of being faked. In the Droeshout the individual features are good and strong, but they do not harmonise well together, the forehead is firm, powerful, and lofty, but too large; the eyes full but rather expressionless, which Shakespeare's, with his abounding vitality could hardly have been, and the general expression somewhat fatuous and wanting which that of the original certainly was not.

The only evidence we have in writing of Shakespeare's appearance is from the pen of Aubrey; he says:—

“Shakespeare was a handsome well-shaped man, very good company and of very ready, pleasant and smooth wit.”

This could hardly have been otherwise. Nature surely would never have cast her greatest interpreter in a mean and unworthy mould.

But however that may be he has certainly done handsomely by his native land, and by the human race.

The epithet “gentle” has been often applied to him whatever precise meaning may have been attached at the time to the word. His great friend and fellow genius, Ben Jonson, thrice refers to him as the “gentle Shakespeare”: and another author with whom Shakespeare may or may not have been acquainted, the great romantic poet, Edmund Spenser, confers on him the same epithet.

The subject of the application of the following lines

has been much discussed, but it can hardly be doubted that Spenser had Shakespeare in his mind when he wrote the following :—

“ And he the man whom Nature selfe hath made  
To mock herself and truth to imitate.”

“ Our *pleasant Willy*,”

and he proceeds :—

“ But that same *gentle* spirit from whose pen  
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow.”

Or it is just possible that he may have been called “gentle” from his fondness for the word! It abounds in his works.

A very touching illustration of this “gentleness” of his disposition occurs in *King John*.

His ruthless severity, his aloofness from his characters, his apparent indifference to good and evil, have often been commented on. It is not Shakespeare’s habit to allow any feelings of humanity to override his art; but when it comes to the extinguishing of Prince Arthur’s eyes by his gaoler Hubert, Shakespeare’s gentle spirit overmasters him, and he cannot proceed.

In reality Prince Arthur was murdered, either by the hands of the king himself, or at his instigation. But in the play it is obviously not Hubert that relents, but Shakespeare himself that cannot proceed with the bloody deed. The touching and sweet pleadings that he puts into the mouth of the princely youth are too much, not for Hubert, but for the artist himself:—

*King John*, ACT IV., SCENE I.

“ *Arth.* Have you the heart? When your head did ache,  
I knit my handkerchief about your brows,  
(The best I had, a princess wrought it me,)  
And I did never ask it you again;  
And with my hand at midnight held your head;  
And; like the watchful minutes to the hour,  
Still and anon cheered up the heavy time;  
Saying, ‘What lack you?’ and, ‘Where lies your grief?’



Or ' What good love may I perform for you ? '   
 Many a poor man's son would have lain still,   
 And ne'er have spoke a loving word to you ;   
 But you at your sick service had a prince.   
 Nay, you may think my love was crafty love,   
 And call it cunning :—do, an if you will :   
 If heaven be pleased that you must use me ill,   
 Why, then you must. Will you put out mine eyes ?   
 Those eyes that never did, nor ever shall,   
 So much as frown on you ? ”

In his own lifetime Shakespeare's works had obtained considerable renown, not merely among his fellow workers, but among many exalted and influential people. The great Queen Elizabeth deigned to smile on him. James I. was “pleased with his own hand to write an amicable letter to Master Shakespeare,” and he had Lord Southampton for his patron, who himself styles him his “especial friend.” But more than that he won the friendship and admiration of Ben Jonson, a very great dramatic writer indeed, and who if Shakespeare had not existed might fairly have laid claim to his dramatic throne.

It was Ben Jonson who wrote the well-known lines opposite the Droeshout engraving, commencing :—

“ This figure that thou here seest put,   
 It was for gentle Shakespeare cut.”

It was he who wrote, to the memory of his beloved William Shakespeare :—

“ Soul of the age,   
 The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage,   
 My Shakespeare rise ! I will not lodge thee by   
 Chaucer, or Spenser : or bid Beaumont lie   
 A little further, to make thee a room :   
 Thou art a monument without a tomb :   
 And art alive still, while thy book doth live,   
 And we have wits to read and praise to give.”

The facts above recounted are but a rough and imperfect outline of our knowledge of Shakespeare. But they are quite sufficient to show that he was no

mythical or apocryphal personage, but that he was the very William Shakespeare as we have always received him and not another, who was born at Stratford-on-Avon, who lived, wrote, sang, and made merry, and who died in his native village leaving behind an imperishable name.

Shakespeare was fortunate or unfortunate as the case may be in having no Boswell like Dr Johnson to emphasise and meticolate on his daily habits and peculiarities. Perhaps it is as well, as there are few characters known to fame that would come out so scathless as that of Dr Johnson from the perpetual and fussy attentions of a Boswell. Johnson in his own rough and uncouth way was a saint as well as a lexicographer, which Shakespeare certainly was not.

"Of William Shakespeare," says Hallam, "whom through the mouths of those he has inspired to body forth the modifications of his immense mind, we seem to know better than any human writer, it may be truly said that we scarcely know anything."

We see him as far as we do see him in the images of his own creation.

"If the details of his life are imperfect," says William Collier, "the history of his mind is complete, and we leave the reader to turn from the contemplation of 'the man Shakespeare' to the study of the poet."

From perusal of his works we shall soon discover that his own words are more appropriate to himself than to the character to which he himself has applied them :—

"His life was gentle : and the elements  
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world—this was a man"—

or rather a myriad-minded man as Coleridge has dubbed him.

With that wonderful mind of his he must have lived many lives, and outvoyaged the wanderings of the much-travelled Ulysses. If we confine the phrase "eventful life" to the mere accidents, movements, and fortunes of this physical frame, then Shakespeare's life was but moderately eventful; but if we extend the phrase, as we have a right to do, and allow it to embrace the images of the mind, the emotions of the soul, and all the varied experiences of thought and expectation, then what life more eventful than his own?

That a mere village lad, the son of a petty village tradesman on the verge of bankruptcy, who could not even write, himself with but little education, and burdened with a wife and family, should at the age of twenty step out from his father's gate, sojourn in London, and return after the short space of about thirty years, the greatest genius in his way that the world has ever seen, or is perhaps ever likely to see, out-miracles the miraculous.

How did he do it? How accomplish what he did? Many assert that he never did it at all, and look elsewhere for the wonder-worker.

But in so doing, they overlook the native richness and power of the human mind, when uncramped by hereditary prejudice, unfettered by learning, and not over-weighted and smothered by the thoughts and opinions of others.

The composition of the man was happily kneaded, the time was opportune, the world was astir, and awaking from the long sleep of the Middle Ages, so Providence chose this literary David with his sling and with his stone, to overthrow the conceit of the wise, and to confound the criticism of the world.

And on whose head do these doubting and undis-

cerning critics wish to place Shakespeare's crown? On the head of no less a person than Lord Bacon, one time Lord Chancellor of England, about the very worst and most improbable selection that could be made, and the most improbable of all improbabilities.

The classic intelligence of an Andrew Lang, or a Sidney Lee, is really wasted in refuting so ridiculous a supposition.

Bacon, the lawyer, the courtier, the philosopher, with his methodical, orderly, and somewhat dry intelligence—imagine this exalted personage frequenting pothouses and taverns to enable him to appreciate and draw such characters as a Falstaff, a Touchstone, or an Autolycus!

Bacon's intellect, it has been observed, was neither disturbed nor imperilled by the promptings of the heart or of friendship, for perfect love he may, without reluctance, be pronounced incapable.

The following verses on the late celebrated Professor Jowett of Balliol were written not many years back by some Oxford wag:—

“ A little garden little Jowett made  
And fenced it with a little palisade,  
If you would know a thing of little Jowett,  
This little garden won't a little show it.”

Well, if the reader would enter into Bacon's mind, let him read his essays on “gardening” and “love,” and then he will appreciate the wide divergence between his mind and that of Shakespeare's.

Their method, order, sequence, and preciseness, with their trim box hedges, riband borders and so forth, would hardly have attracted Will Shakespeare, with his sweet woodnotes wild. For prisons, however orderly and delicious, Shakespeare had no inclination. You might as well expect pineapples from plane trees or

gems from chalkpits, as Shakespeare's sonnets from the pen of Bacon.

And how does Bacon speak of love?

"The stage is more beholding to love than the life of man. For as to the stage, love is ever a matter of comedies, and now and then of tragedies; but in life it doth much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury. You may observe that amongst all the great and worthy persons, there is not one that hath been transported to the mad degree of love; which shows that great spirit and great business do keep out this mad passion. Neither doth this weakness appear to others only but to the loved most of all, except the love be reciproque."

This is not to quarrel with Bacon as to his estimate of love, there is much wisdom in his observations, and he may be right or wrong.

Love may have marred as many lives as it has made, but no true lover ever yet weighed it in the cold scales of calculating wisdom.

Is it possible that the same pen could have written the above description of love, and the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*? If not, then Bacon never wrote Shakespeare.

But another pestilent heresy has arisen of late which should be trampled on and smothered as soon as may be.

Shakespeare it appears was not an Englishman. O ye Gods! how much further is the kingdom of crankdom to extend? We are now told that he was a Welshman, and even the Germans lay claim to him.

Just imagine then, the plodding, analytical, metaphysically intoxicated, and in matters of love ultramelodramatic Teuton being even capable of producing the concrete and virile splendours of Shakespeare. The idea is almost blasphemous.

And then the Welsh! No, Shakespeare was not a Welshman. The Celtic mind is far too per-fervid and uncontrolled for so great an undertaking. Shakespeare himself would not have been flattered had you called him a Welshman. He makes game of their onions and pronunciation. Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, cuts after all but a sorry figure; and the officer Fluellen in *Henry V.*, though doubtless a good soldier, has his full share of the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of his race, which Shakespeare is at particular pains to emphasise and elaborate.

No! let there be no doubt about it, Shakespeare was an Englishman to the core, and sprung from the core of England. Throughout, his writings are the most perfect exposition of all that is best and greatest in the Anglo-Saxon race.

He has been laid claim to in other than geographical quarters. All people, all classes, and all creeds are anxious to appropriate him, and have some share in his fame.

It has been asserted that he was a good Tory. If loyalty to the king, respect for the powers that be, and devotion to his country are the monopoly of the Tory party, then a Tory Shakespeare unquestionably was. But his mind was at once conservative and progressive. His nature was too great to be pigeon-holed and earmarked as the peculiar property of any section, party, or creed in any department of action, or of thought.

He was a child of the Reformation, of the Renaissance, and of Liberty. He stands four-square to all the winds that blow, and would have received with a sense of exhilarating joy the breath of life from whatever quarter it might come.

Politics, as we understand them in these days, were a thing unknown in his. The royal order and ordering of things was so well established throughout the world, that no one, least of all a poet, would ever have dreamt of calling it in question.

But it was the office rather than its occupant that Shakespeare held in veneration. He says:—

“Not all the water in the rough, wide sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king ;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord.”

A peasant was as dear to him as a king ; he could discern and appreciate the man whatever his trappings or surroundings, or to whatever strata in life he might belong.

All things, and all men, were to him equally great and equally insignificant. Nature, that awful, if gentle mother, could annihilate, and does annihilate, the best and worst at a blow.

“What care these roarers for the name of king,”

he says of the shipwrecked monarch in *The Tempest*.

And again in *Hamlet* :—

“Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.”

Strange to say he does refer to Socialism, and turns its arguments very neatly and succinctly against itself, in the following way. He makes old Gonzalo in *The Tempest* advocate its theories thus:—

“Gon. I’ the commonwealth I would by contraries  
Execute all things ; for no kind of traffic  
Would I admit : no name of magistrate ;  
Letters should not be known ; riches, poverty,  
And use of service, none ; contract, succession,  
Bourn, bound of land, tithe, vineyard, none ;  
No use of metal, or corn, or wine, or oil :  
No occupation ; all men idle, all :



And women too, but innocent, and pure :

No sovereignty,——

*Seb.* Yet he would be king on't.

*Aut.* The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning.

*Gon.* All things in common nature should produce,  
Without sweat or endeavour : treason and felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,  
Would I not have ; but nature should bring forth,  
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance  
To feed my innocent people.

*Seb.* No marrying among his subjects ?

*Aut.* None, man ; all idle, whores and knaves.

*Gon.* I would with such perfection govern in,  
To excel the golden age.

*Seb.* Save his majesty !

*Aut.* Long live Gonzalo."



## CHAPTER III

### SHAKESPEARE'S AGE, AND ITS CHARACTER

HAVING said so much in the last chapter of Shakespeare the man, and the few facts that are known about him, it might not be amiss to glance for a moment at the character of the age in which he lived, and of the nature of the intellectual soil from which he sprang.

We are all of us children of our surroundings, and men's thoughts and utterances are really as much the resultant of the spirit of the age in which they find themselves as of any pure virtue in themselves.

If Shakespeare were living in these days, it may be stated almost as a certainty, that he would not have written his works as we now know them. The age of Shakespeare was in literature as in most things an age of synthesis and construction. The motto of his times might very well have been, "Touch, Taste, and Handle"—a practical time of very real and living representation in all departments of life. His literature was concrete and realistic; there was something very tangible and substantial about it. The dreary and rather dreamy carelessness and lassitude with all its analysis and introspection that stamps so much of modern popular writing was quite foreign to the times of Elizabeth.

Men in those days wrote down what they meant, and what they saw; there was, so to speak, no "true

inwardness," — dreadful phrase — or rather, whatever "true inwardness" men possessed they converted at once into "real outwardness" usually very forcibly expressed in the current vernacular of the day.

There were no mental reservations, hidden meanings, and cryptic and esoteric utterances, left for the unwary and uninstructed reader to discover and decipher if he could.

It is unnecessary here, and not the intention of the writer, to put before the reader an appreciation of the mind and art of Shakespeare. It has been admirably done over and over again by many writers of many lands, and perhaps by none more effectively and with truer insight and power than by the late Professor Dowden, in his well-known work "Shakspeare, His Mind and Art."

But at the same time it will not be purposeless, indeed it may be necessary and advantageous to the reader, for a proper understanding of Shakespeare's outlook, standpoint, and position, and of the realistic and concrete tendency of his writings, to remind him, as briefly as may be, of the mental habit of Shakespeare's contemporaries, and of the atmosphere and surroundings in which he lived, and moved, and had his being. And it would be impossible to do this better than by a few brief quotations from Professor Dowden himself.

One must presuppose in the reader some slight acquaintance, at any rate, with the age of Elizabeth. It was an age, in many respects like our own, of great stir and activity. Men's minds and bodies were reaching out in all directions. New discoveries were being made, new worlds were being conquered, old enemies were being encountered and overthrown. Gold was sought after as eagerly as now, but through the medium of piracy, instead of the Stock Exchange.

Men were in pursuit of the visible and tangible, and had little time or inclination for speculation on the hereafter. Life in those days was short; men were hurried and harried, all along the line and in every direction; they might be knocked on the head at any moment, and had as much as they could do to keep body and soul together from day to day.

And this spirit of concentrated vitality and activity is reflected in Shakespeare.

The same spirit of realisation and practical accommodation and application prevailed equally in Science and in the Church.

"Now," says Professor Dowden, "the same soil that produced Bacon and Hooker produced Shakspeare; the same environment fostered the growth of all three. Can we discover anything possessed in common by the scientific movement, the ecclesiastical movement, and the drama of the period? That which appears to be common to all is a rich feeling for positive concrete fact.

"The facts with which the drama concerns itself are those of human character in its living play.

"And assuredly, whatever be its imperfections, its crudeness, its extravagancies, no other body of literature has amassed in equal fulness and equal variety a store of concrete facts concerning human character and human life; assuredly not the drama of Æschylus and Sophocles, not the drama of Calderon and Lope de Vega, not the drama of Corneille and Racine. These give us views of human life and select portions of it for artistic handling.

"The Elizabethan drama gives us the staff of life itself, the coarse with the fine, the mean with the heroic, the humorous and grotesque with the tragic and the terrible."

And again:—

“A vigorous, mundane vitality—this constitutes the basis of the Elizabethan drama. Vigour reveals on the one hand the tragedy of life. Love and hatred, joy and sorrow, life and death being very real to a vigorous nature, tragedy becomes possible. To one who exists languidly from day to day, neither can the cross and the passion of any human heart be intelligible nor the solemn intensities of joy, the glorious resurrection, and ascension, of a life and soul. The heart must be all alive and sensitive before the imagination can conceive with swift assurance, and no hesitation or error, extremes of rapture and of pain.”

“Now we know something of the Elizabethan period, and we know that Shakespeare was a man who prospered in that period. In that special environment he thrived: he put forth his blossoms, and bore fruit. And in the smaller matter of material success he flourished also. In an Elizabethan atmosphere he reached his full stature, and became not only great and wise, but famous, rich, and happy. Can we discover any significance in these facts? We are told that Shakespeare ‘was not of an age, but for all time.’ That assertion misleads us. He was for all time by virtue of certain powers and perceptions, but he also belonged especially to an age, his own age, the age of Spenser, Jonson, and Bacon—a Protestant age, a monarchical age, an age eminently positive and practical.”

And then the Professor proceeds, and asks the question: “What is the ethical significance of that literary movement to which Shakespeare belonged and of which he was a part—the Elizabethan drama?” The question seems at first improper. There is perhaps no body of literature which has less of an express tendency for the intellect than the drama of

the age of Elizabeth. It is the outcome of a rich and manifold life; it is full of a sense of enjoyment, and overflowing with energy; but it is for the most part absolutely devoid of a conscious purpose.

The chief playwright of the movement declared that the end of playing, "both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature."

A mirror has no tendency. The questions we ask about it are, "Does this mirror reflect clearly and faithfully?" and "In what direction is it turned?"

"Capacity for perceiving, for enjoying, and for reproducing facts, and facts of as great variety as possible, this was the qualification of a dramatist in the days of Elizabeth. The facts were those of human passion and human activity. He needed not, as each of our poets at the present time needs, to have a doctrine; a revelation, or an interpretation. The mere fact was enough without any theory about the fact, and this fact men saw more in its totality, more in the round because they approached it in the spirit of frank enjoyment."

"This vitality which underlies the Elizabethan drama is essentially mundane. To it, all that is upon this earth is real: and it does not concern itself greatly about the reality of other things. Of heaven or of hell it has no power to sing. It finds such and such facts here and now, and does not invent or discover supernatural causes to explain facts. It pursues man to the moment of death, but it pursues him no further. If it confesses 'the burden of the mystery' of human life, it does not attempt to lighten that burden by any 'Thus saith the Lord' which cannot be verified or attested by actual experience. If it contains a divine element, the divine is to be looked for *in* the human

not apart from the human. It knows eternity only through time which is a part of eternity."

The above passages are sufficient to reveal to the reader the character and intellectual tendency of the age of Shakespeare. He himself conforms to that spirit and confirms it in his own creations.

Perhaps some readers might say, "Are not Shakespeare's works enough, why trouble about his times?"

Well, there is more than one way of apprehending a person and his works. Cardinal Newman, in his "Grammar of Assent," tells us that there are two ways of apprehending a person or an object. One he calls the real and the other the notional apprehension. For instance, if, say, a man is placed suddenly before you, you have a real apprehension of him. The man, if you have never seen or heard of him before, conveys nothing to your mind, but that he is a piece of flesh, whose presence creates in you a pleasurable sensation or the reverse. But if you know the man as well by reputation, by his achievements, his surroundings, society, and so forth, you have not only a real but a notional apprehension of him. And so with a work of art its value is enormously enhanced by the reputation of the producer and the age in which it was produced. You have then a notional apprehension of it.

Of course a real apprehension of Shakespeare is impossible: he is dead and gone. But a notional apprehension we can have, chiefly through his works, and that notional apprehension can be enlarged and enriched by the additional knowledge of his times.

So some slight acquaintance with his age is not entirely thrown away.

The charge has sometimes been brought against Shakespeare that there is no moral purpose in his

writings, and that he exhibits a supreme indifference to good and evil.

Indeed, so strictly does Shakespeare set his seal upon, so to speak, and conform to this spirit of his age, namely, that of keeping close to, and delineating only the visible realities of life, that he has been accused, though unjustly so by many, of a want of a due appreciation of, and distinction between, virtue and vice, of an aloofness from, and carelessness about, the morals of his characters, and of having no encouraging gospel of inspiration and hope with which to invigorate his fellow men.

The Italian, Joseph Mazzini, and the Englishman, Dr Johnson, are both emphatic on this point, and condemn Shakespeare in this particular accordingly.

"Shakespeare," says Mazzini, "shows neither the consciousness of a law, nor of humanity, the future is mute in his dramas, and enthusiasm for great principles unknown. His genius comprehends and sums up the past and the present, it does not initiate the future. He interprets an epoch, he announces none."

That Shakespeare shows no consciousness of a law, or of humanity, is really the very reverse of the truth. He sees a law very clearly indeed, and all his characters stand or fall by it. That law is the inexorable law of the workings of Nature. Nature, as has been said, has no favourites, she makes no distinctions, the individuals, whether good or bad, are all subject to that law, and Shakespeare interprets aright the iron inflexibility of its application.

As regards enthusiasm for great principles, it is hardly to be expected. Shakespeare's plays were written ostensibly for the stage.

It must be borne in mind, moreover, that he is no inspirer or prophet, that he has no one message to deliver



to mankind. It is not his province or vocation directly to instruct humanity in the paths of material or any other success. All he does is, and all he professes to do, is to hold "the mirror up to Nature," and let Nature convey, in the garments that he clothes her in, her message to mankind, and enable man to see, as it were, in a looking glass, humanity itself, in its manifold activities, in its sorrows and its joys, in its hopes and fears, in all its varying moods whether of depression or exaltation, with all its keen susceptibilities and mental complexities, with its manifold shades of character and colouring, with its many diversities, and innumerable varieties, as it treads its journey from the cradle to the grave.

And granted that Shakespeare is not very concerned about great principles, and great causes in the abstract, no man can be more enthusiastic than himself in the portrayal of their application, when exhibited in the individual man.

Read that touching and beautiful eulogy of his on personal devotion in the scene in *As You Like It*, between the old servant Adam, and the youthful Orlando, when expelled from his ancestral home. The old servant hands over all his hard-earned savings to his young master, and elects to follow him to the end.

"*Orl.* What, wouldst thou have me go and beg my food ?  
Or with a base and boisterous sword enforce  
A thievish living on the common road ?  
This I must do, or know not what to do :  
Yet this I will not do, do how I can ;  
I rather will subject me to the malice  
Of a diverted blood and bloody brother.

*Adam.* But do not so. I have five hundred crowns,  
The thrifty hire I sav'd under your father,  
Which I did store, to be my foster-nurse  
When service should in my old limbs lie lame,  
And unregarded age in corners thrown :  
Take that ; and He that doth the ravens feed,  
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,



Be comfort to my age ! Here is the gold ;  
 All this I give you. Let me be your servant :  
 Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty ;  
 For in my youth I never did apply  
 Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood ;  
 Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo  
 The means of weakness and debility ;  
 Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,  
 Frosty, but kindly : let me go with you ;  
 I'll do the service of a younger man  
 In all your business and necessities.

*Orl.* O good old man, how well in thee appears  
 The constant service of the antique world,  
 When service swet for duty, not for meed !  
 Thou art not for the fashion of these times,  
 Where none will sweat but for promotion ;  
 And having that, do choke their service up  
 Even with the having : 'tis not so with thee.  
 But, poor old man, thou prun'st a rotten tree,  
 That cannot so much as a blossom yield  
 In lieu of all thy pains and husbandry.  
 But come thy ways ; we'll go along together ;  
 And ere we have thy youthful wages spent,  
 We'll light upon some settled low content.

*Adam.* Master, go on, and I will follow thee,  
 To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty—  
 From seventeen years till now almost fourscore  
 Here liv'd I, but now live here no more.  
 At seventeen years many their fortunes seek ;  
 But at fourscore it is too late a week :  
 Yet fortune cannot recompense me better  
 Than to die well, and not my master's debtor."

Shakespeare again is certainly enthusiastic about the duty of patriotism, in his day a very necessary, great, and vital principle, though as time goes on, and the nations become more intermixed, and the world more cosmopolitan, its lustre may tend somewhat to diminish.

No man who had not the fire of patriotism burning very strongly within him, could have written that great pean on his native land, which he puts into the mouth of John of Gaunt in *Richard II.* :—

" This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,  
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
 This other Eden, demi-paradise ;

This fortress built by Nature for herself  
 Against infection and the hand of war ;  
 This happy breed of men, this little world ;  
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
 Against the envy of less happier lands ;  
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,  
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,  
 Fear'd by their breed, and famous by their birth,  
 Renowned for their deeds as far from home,—  
 For Christian service and true chivalry,—  
 As is the sepulchre, in stubborn Jewry,  
 Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son ;—  
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,  
 Dear for her reputation through the world,  
 Is now leas'd out—I die pronouncing it—  
 Like to a tenement or pelting farm :  
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,  
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
 Of watery Neptune, 's now bound in with shame,  
 With inky blots, and rotten parchment bonds :  
 That England, that was wont to conquer others,  
 Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.  
 Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,  
 How happy then were my ensuing death ! ”

But if the criticism of Mazzini is inaccurate and beside the mark, surely that of Dr Johnson is unjust and inexcusable. It is true that he bows down at the shrine of Shakespeare as he is bound to do, and lavishes on him with one hand unsparing praise, but he is not equally ready always to extend the other, as let the following passage witness :—

“ Shakespeare with his excellencies has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall show them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration.

“ His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books and men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any

moral purpose. From his writings, indeed, a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is he always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance."

The above criticism is quite foreign to Dr Johnson's usual discrimination and good sense. When he wrote it he must have been passing through a moment of temporary aberration; or was he seized with a sudden attack of jealousy! He is evidently ill at ease, grumbling inwardly, and probably realising for the first time that a greater than Dr Johnson stands before him; a thought to a man of Johnson's peculiar temperament and mental powers, naturally disturbing and unwelcome.

Indeed, all through his criticism of Shakespeare, laudatory and eulogistic as for the most part it is, there runs an undercurrent of splenetic irritability and annoyance. He is compelled, like the rest of us, to bow down at the shrine of the great bard; but Dr Johnson was himself a pontiff in literature, and obeisance is unbecoming in a pope.

It is amusing; for what does the learned Doctor mean when he asserts that Shakespeare's faults obscure and overwhelm any other merit?

He has no moral purpose, says Dr Johnson! But why should he have? Shakespeare is on the stage, not in the pulpit. Moreover, it is not true. If his plays have no ethical intent, they have at least an ethical effect, which amounts to much the same thing.

"He sacrifices virtue to convenience." No! Shakespeare does not, but the facts of life very frequently do.

"His precepts and axioms drop casually from him"—the best and most artistic way of being effective. One does not expect in a play to be peppered with moral bullets.

One might ask, had Dr Johnson any moral purpose when he wrote his great Dictionary? If not, then according to his own argument, it is a worthless production, and fit only for the rubbish heap.

As a matter of fact Shakespeare does moralise exceedingly, frequently in his soliloquies, and not infrequently in his dialogues.

If one makes happiness the touchstone and result of true morality, then Shakespeare has moralised to some purpose. For his writings not only delight the senses, but stimulate the intellect and strengthen the understanding.

Happiness is the end and aim of us all, and he must be a dullard indeed, who can extract no pleasure from Shakespeare's immortal productions.

However, the learned doctor is soon himself again, and makes handsome amends in the following very just appreciation:—

"The composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp and gratifying the mind with endless diversity.

"Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished into brightness. Shakespeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in inexhaustible plenty,

though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals."

There is one conspicuous quality in Shakespeare, which apparently was developed in him very early in life, and a quality that some men seem never to acquire, and many only late in life; and that is a true sense of proportion and the relative value of things.

To see things in their true light and proportion is the prerogative of age, and one of the few advantages it possesses over youth. Indeed it is almost synonymous with wisdom. A man can only be called wise when he sees things in their proper relationships and makes his deductions accordingly; and this faculty is only to be acquired by observation and experience, except in the case of a few rare and gifted individuals.

It is this very want of proportion or balance in the majority of Shakespeare's great impersonations that is the cause of their overthrow and misfortunes.

He shows us in his characters how fatal it is for any individual in any class of life to let any single passion or possession, whether good or bad, entirely dominate his life and get the complete mastery over it.

A really happy and successful life is usually founded on a process of accommodation. You must accommodate and circumvent the various stones and obstacles in the road of life, or if driven by some one passion or possession you stumble over them, you will be broken, and if they fall on you they will grind you to powder.

And not merely is this outward accommodation to circumstances necessary, but a sort of inner accommodation and adjustment of the various moral qualities as well.

To cultivate one quality, so to speak, at the expense of the rest, and concentrate on that alone, may gain for a man a sort of frozen respect from his fellows,

but it will hardly confer much happiness on himself, or make him a very congenial companion.

The line that the majority of people take, though for the most part unconsciously, is to cast a hurried glance at the many and varied aspects of truth, reduce them to a sort of common denomination, and regulate their lives accordingly.

It must be remembered that most of the leading passages in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies round which the rest of the play revolves, are not merely living human beings, but great types of character as well. And it is this excess, growth, and predominance in them of one great virtue or defect, that brings the majority of them to an untimely end.

In the case of Cæsar it was ambition. Rightly or wrongly he was suspected by the old republican party under Brutus of making himself a king.

"Brutus says he is ambitious, and Brutus is an honourable man."

And Cæsar was assassinated accordingly.

It is the same with Lady Macbeth; she wished to be a queen, and waded through bloodshed and murder to attain her end. It is Lady Macbeth who dominates the piece, Macbeth is a mere tool in her hands. He, too, had his ambitions, but he shrank from murder, and was by nature neither treacherous nor cruel. It required all his wife's persuasion to bring him to the sticking point.

"*Lady M.* Yet do I fear thy nature;  
It is too full of the milk of human kindness,  
To catch the nearest way: thou would'st be great:  
Art not without ambition; but without  
The illness should attend it. What would'st thou highly,  
That thou would'st holily; would'st not play false,  
And yet would wrongly win.

Hither hither

That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;  
And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
All that impedes thee from the golden round."



But be it remembered that Lady Macbeth, notwithstanding her daring and masterful nature, is the first to break down.

She goes mad; and dies a mental as well as a physical death; Macbeth, as is fitting, only a physical one.

*“ Doctor. This disease is beyond my practice; yet I have known those who have walked in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds.*

*Lady M. To bed, to bed, there's knocking at the gate: come, come, come, come, give me your hand: what is done cannot be undone: to bed, to bed, to bed.*

*Doctor. Will she now go to bed?*

*G. Directly.*

*Doctor. Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds  
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds  
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets;  
More needs she the divine than the physician:—  
God, God, forgive us all! Look after her;  
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,  
And still keep eyes upon her:—so, good night.”*

In the case of Richard III. it was not ambition alone that was his undoing, but hate. He hated mankind, and was ambitious with a purpose; that he might chastise his fellows, and whenever, and wherever, he found his opportunity, he did chastise them, not merely with whips, but with scorpions.

He died on the field of Bosworth amid the execrations of his countrymen, and the Duke of Richmond, afterwards King Henry VII., expressed the voice of the whole nation when he exclaimed:

*“ Richm. God and your arms be praised, victorious friend; The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead.”*

Or again let us regard for a moment the character of the Roman General and patrician, Coriolanus.

Coriolanus had great qualities, marred by an intense egoism, inordinate patrician pride, and an ungovernable temper. If ever a being exhibited in his behaviour

and bearing the old saying of Horace, "Odi profanum vulgus et arceo," that being was Coriolanus.

He was one of the stern and unbending Tories of old Rome. He loathed with a supreme loathing the lower orders, the rabble, the common herd, the many headed and unclean monster, indeed any one and every one that belonged to a class beneath his own.

He could not be civil to them, even when civility was a necessity. He could hardly restrain his rage, or keep his countenance in their presence. Even the tribunes of the people he despised.

"Behold there are the tribunes of the people,  
The tongues of the common mouth; I do despise them;  
For they do prank them in authority,  
Against all noble sufferance."

Even the tribune Brutus finds it necessary to intervene.

"*Bru.* You speak o' the people,  
As if you were a God to punish,  
Not a man of their infirmity.

*Cor.* Let them hang.  
The fires in the lowest hell fold in the people.  
You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate  
As reeks o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize  
As the dead carcasses of unburied men  
That do corrupt my air."

And then he adds—which is not surprising:—

"The beast with many heads butts me away."

Aristocratic pride could hardly carry a man further than that. This insane pride, egoism, and fierce insolence brought about, as was inevitable, his own destruction. Notwithstanding the grandeur of his character and the great services he had rendered to his country, the people could put up with him no more.

"*Conspirators.* Let him die for it.  
Tear him to pieces! Do it presently!  
Insolent villain.

*All.* Kill, kill, kill."



And so Coriolanus meets his end.

The counterpart of Coriolanus is to be found in many countries, even at this day. We all recognise and have come across our Coriolanuses. They may lie lower now than formerly, and dare not crow quite so loudly, but they exist.

But even they are beginning to realise the wisdom of the dictum of Napoleon, that Providence is on the side in peace as well as in war, of the big battalions, and that the interests of the many must in the end prevail against the interests of the few, however blue their blood or commanding their personalities.

There has been a tendency of late in some quarters to drag Shakespeare into the political arena, and exploit his writings in the interests of a particular party. The sentiments that he puts into the mouth of Coriolanus, and which Coriolanus hurls against the people, are attributed to Shakespeare himself, and on the strength of them Shakespeare is acclaimed as a reactionary in thought and an aristocrat and autocrat in opinion.

And they endeavour further to strengthen and buttress up this contention by quoting his treatment of the rebel and demagogue Jack Cade.

Of course it is grossly unfair to endeavour to fix on or attribute to any writer, dramatic or otherwise, the expressions and opinions that he puts into the mouths of his characters as his own. Shakespeare really states the case of both sides very fairly indeed. Flouted authority uses towards the rebels the language of flouted authority, and the rebels, as is their wont, answer back with the language of angry and ignorant vituperation.

Shakespeare draws, in a few masterly strokes, a never to be forgotten picture of the eternal demagogue. The language is condensed, but it is all there,

the demagogue in his gospel, his character, and his declamation.

"*Cade*. Be brave, then ; for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny : the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops ; and I will make it felony to drink small beer : all the realm shall be in common ; and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass : and when I am king,—as king I will be,—

*All*. God save your majesty !

*Cade*. I thank you, good people :—there shall be no money ; all shall eat and drink on my score ; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers, and worship me their lord.

*Dick*. The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

*Cade*. Nay, that I mean to do. Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment ? that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man ? Some say the bee stings : but I say, 'tis the bee's wax ; for I did but seal once to a thing, and I was never mine own man since.—How now ! who's there ?"

Cade's teachings and demands, are, after all, not so far apart from, nor do they differ very materially from, much of the teaching of many living politicians.

Shakespeare's opinions on this particular occasion appear to have been, and very probably were, on the side of constituted authority. In the person of Iden his language towards the decapitated Cade is cruel and hard, but that goes no way to prove that at heart in his political leanings he was either reactionary or autocratic. If it did, it would give the lie to his whole teaching and nature, and make him a traitor to the very class from which he sprang.

Justice to all is the keynote of his teaching, and his writings amply illustrate the fact.

And it must not be forgotten that Shakespeare is an individualist *par excellence*. It is the individual to whatever class he may belong that interests him ; of mankind in the mass, whether high or low, he concerns himself very little.

And then there is poor Timon of Athens, one of those generous and confiding natures, that give to every one with a lavish and unsparing hand. He gave and gave, until he gave away more than he possessed, and until, deserted by his false and sponging friends and retainers, never made the great discovery, that if you give a man a sovereign, you may find a difficulty in getting back a shilling at a pinch.

When his friends had sucked him dry they left him in the lurch. He of all men might well say:—

“ Blow, blow, thou Winter’s wind,  
Thou art not so unkind  
As man’s ingratitude.”

So in disgust he cuts himself off from his fellows and perishes on the lone sea-shore.

“ Timon hath made his everlasting mansion  
Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood ;  
Who once a day with his embossed froth  
The turbulent surge shall cover.”

And then there is Romeo, shot through the heart with Cupid’s arrow, and the savage Othello, who revenges his own mad act, in a fit of jealousy, by committing murder on himself.

“ One that lov’d, not wisely, but too well.”

And one might go on multiplying instances.

But perhaps enough has been said to impart to the reader something of the times and of the teaching of Shakespeare, and to show him that if the intent of his teaching is not ethical, in effect it certainly is, and that he held fast at least to the principle of patriotism, and by innumerable illustrations points the great lesson that it is disastrous to the individual to let any one quality or passion, be it good or bad, run riot in and dominate the soul.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHAKESPEARE, HIS DUAL NATURE

WHAT enabled Shakespeare to do what he did, and write as he did? How did he produce his wonderful plays? What was there in the nature of the man, in the quality of his brain, and in his own character that made such productions possible?

The longer one surveys as a whole the wonderful structure of his work, its beauty, its massive grandeur, its variety, and above all its fidelity to human life, the more amazing and bewildering does it appear. The bricks of this literary fabric are so deftly put together, the words so exactly fit the thought, that one can hardly detect the mortar that retains them. Can this be the work of one man, or of any man however gifted? One sometimes is inclined to imagine that Nature, or some invisible power, stood beside Shakespeare as he wrote, used him merely as a medium or automaton, directed his pen, and compelled him to put down what he did. The man Shakespeare himself is invisible throughout: you can see him only in his works. But the works, if one only studies them with reflection, and at sufficient length, enable one to construct with considerable accuracy, indeed almost with certainty, the powers and entire character of their author.

Shakespeare himself is invisible. This is doubtless

due largely to the fact that he was utterly devoid of any sort of self-consciousness. If he had a craving for admiration and approbation, he was not apprehensive about it; he could disregard it altogether, and was not at all the man to allow the lack of it to mar and impede the operations of his mind.

No where can one discern a touch of egoism. He wrote on and on, as if Nature were the only spectator, and that man as a critic did not exist. There is no intentional building for immortality here; and conscious as he must have been of his own great powers, he seemed to set little store by them, and almost to regard with indifference his own immortal productions. He was not the least anxious about their publication; nor did he ever court or solicit for them publicity. The greater part of his plays were not published at his death, and the few which appeared in his life were apparently thrust into the world, without the care of the author, and probably without his knowledge. And the absence of this egoism adds an additional charm to all he wrote.

How many latter day publications are marred and spoilt by an egoism that prevails throughout, in some, blatant and thinly veiled, in others, hardly to be detected, well hidden no doubt, but there.

There is always fibre in the thought of Shakespeare, and a knitting up and tightening of expression. And this knitting up and tightening of expression is in itself an artistic operation. All true art, in whatever field of exercise, is really the outcome of the play of the individual mind, within the limits of a wheel of a well thought out and long recognised method of construction. This wheel is capacious and elastic, and capable of considerable pressure and expansion in every portion of its circumference, to enable it to let

in, and allow for, the peculiar idiosyncrasies of the individual mind. But there is a point beyond which no artist may lawfully stretch it. If he wilfully breaks through, defies, and violates it, he is no longer the servant of cosmos or law, but soon discovers that he is in the broken and desolate region of chaos and confusion, and his work takes on the form of either the grotesque, the horrible, the weird, or the obscene. His work becomes, not creative, but the very reverse, dissolute and destructive.

Individualists may fret as they may, but there is, and always must be, a standard not severely conventional but inherent in the nature of things, which carries with it the sanction and experience of ages, and which no labourer in any field of art can afford to ignore, be his genius what it may.

Shakespeare, great artist though he was, instinctively recognised this law, and bowed down before it. This does not imply that he conformed deliberately or even consciously in his utterances to any set artistic limitation to the expansion of his thought. That is not the English way; but he instinctively recognised the unwritten laws of propriety. In his language and utterances he keeps the *via media*, and is neither seduced by the virtuoso and eccentric on the one hand, or by the vulgar on the other. Everything he touches he adorns, and enriches and ennobles the language as he proceeds.

Dr Johnson makes this very clear in a passage worthy of quotation and remembrance:—

“If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation, a style which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language as to remain settled and unaltered: this style is probably



to be sought, in the common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood without ambition of elegance. The polite are always catching modish innovations, and the learned depart from established forms of speech, in hope of finding or making better: those who wish for distinction escape the vulgar, when the vulgar is right; but there is a conversation above grossness, and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue. He is therefore more agreeable to the ears of the present age than any other author equally remote, and among other excellencies deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of our language."

Shakespeare is constantly referred to as a great creative genius, indeed some go so far as to assert that with the exception of Homer—the darling child of the classical nursery—he was the only creative literary genius that ever existed, and that he alone was possessed of true creative power.

Let us regard for a moment these two qualities, creative power and genius.

What is creative power? The human brain at its best has only two gifts—the one, that of putting two and two together, and the other, that of recording what it sees, feels, and hears, through the medium of the senses.

Shakespeare, of course, in the primary meaning of the word, created nothing; in that sense no man is a creator. But he was an artistic creator, possibly the greatest that ever lived. That is to say, he had the gift of moulding words into sentences so pregnant with thought, fancy, and observation that he far excelled in this gift all that were before him, and ages may yet elapse before he is equalled or surpassed.

His rival may some day appear, "as the voyaging spirit of man cannot remain within the enclosure of any one age, or of any single mind."

Shakespeare's brain, then, was the most perfect recording instrument hitherto discovered in any single being. He did not create the impressions he produced: they are the common property of all. All men feel them: if they felt them not, they would fail to recognise them in Shakespeare.

The least artistic amongst us can comfort ourselves with the reflection that we are all of us, be it a little, more or less—probably less—potential Homers, Dantes, and Shakespeares. The difference between the latter and ordinary men is that they have the will, the patience, and persistency to bring to the birth, mould what they see and feel with their own emotions, and present them as indelible pictures to mankind. They are the Daniels among men; they interpret for us the handwriting of Nature, which we but dimly apprehend.

Shakespeare was, moreover, a great artistic photographer. The lenses of his instrument were perfect; he knew how to take advantage of the lights and shades in human character, and the propitious moment in which to depict them. He was also a perfect developer. His pictures are never blurred, but always clear-cut and well defined.

Students of Shakespeare cannot fail to observe that frequently a very delicate and beautiful embroidery of dialogue and what not, surrounds as it were in a frame or encasement, the chief figures of the picture under creation.

There was an old-fashioned idea that the poet was born, and not made:—

"The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,"

and so forth. It was imagined that the poet had some quality innate in his brain, which, when it had reached



boiling point, could contain itself no longer, overflowed, or burst through its receptacle, and flooded all the paper in the neighbourhood, to the delight and instruction of mankind.

The aphorism was doubtless invented by the wise; born poets, they thought—and perhaps rightly—were sufficient: manufactured ones, as well, would be intolerable. This dictum requires some qualification.

Poets are both born and made, and more frequently made than born. Byron, Keats, and Shelley may be quoted as instances of the poet born; Milton and Browning as purely manufactured. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is doubtless a great piece of work, but there is little spontaneity about it, and it was evidently put together and built up, brick by brick, with great labour, learning, and care.

Shakespeare was both born and made.

Nearly all, or, at any rate, by far the larger part of his writings, has the appearance of spontaneity and sudden inspiration.

We say, the appearance of spontaneity, for however fine and strong the composition of his brain, whatever his ear for the music and disposition of words, and whatever the natural alertness of his wit and understanding, he must have toiled long and incessantly to bring all these qualities into play, and to force them to focus, with unerring precision, the unrivalled condensation of his thought.

If the truth were known, probably no literary artist in ancient or modern times ever thought or laboured harder than Shakespeare.

Byron, himself a fluent and prolific writer, was feign to confess that good reading was hard writing—an assertion which any man who tries to write for himself will find it difficult to dispute.

Shakespeare was a great genius, people say, and make that account for the whole. It is an easy method of getting rid of any further analysis of Shakespeare's extraordinary powers. But what is genius? Its definition has often been attempted, but never with any very great measure of success. Some regard it as a divine fire, a sort of radium in the brain, bestowed on a few gifted individuals, in varying degrees of intensity. Others as an "infinite capacity for taking pains." This last is quite false, more especially in the realms of literature, music, and painting. Many men might labour a thousand years, and even then would be incapable of producing a single play of Shakespeare, or a sonata equal to Beethoven. And even if they possessed this essential quality of genius it is useless and unfruitful, unless propelled into life by the physiological assistance of its possessor; it requires a certain, driving power to kindle the flame, and to keep the current—to borrow a phrase from electricity—constant, strong, and bright.

There are many departments of labour, such as Law, Medicine, Mechanics, and the like, in which an infinite capacity for exertion will carry a man far, and his labour may be productive of results of far greater benefit and utility to mankind; but that is not genius.

Shakespeare himself puts into the mouth of Brutus the words:—

“The genius and the mortal instrument,”

as if genius itself were a quality apart from ordinary mortality.

But as regards Shakespeare himself, there were propelling forces from without, as well as from within. You cannot separate a man entirely from the spirit of his age and regard him merely as an isolated entity.

All men are affected by this spirit, and the more sensitive their natures, the more keenly do they feel it, and enter into its aspirations. We are all, if not exactly creatures of our circumstances and surroundings, at any rate powerfully affected by them; and was Shakespeare, with his all-embracing mind and passionate nature, likely to be ignorant of and unaffected by the throbs of his age and the beatings of the great pulse of humanity?

It is a very trite observation, but in treating of Shakespeare it is necessary to recall the fact that in the age of Elizabeth England was entering on a new era, old things were passing away, and all things were becoming new. "Behold, I make all things new," would be no inappropriate motto for that age, as well as for our own.

England was just emerging from barbarism. The long and bloody Wars of the Roses which devastated England for so long, and had depleted the ranks of the nobility to the verge of annihilation, and which were little more than an internecine strife between rival factions to settle their various pretensions to pedigree and power, were a thing of the past. The House of Tudor, securely seated on the throne, from one end of England to the other, was represented in the person of Elizabeth by a monarch who, if not one of the best, was at any rate one of the ablest, the most opportune and picturesque that ever held a sceptre or swayed the destinies of a great people.

England was fortunate in her possession, rather than that she was fortunate in herself; her very deficiencies seem to have made for the efficiency and happiness of her people.

England at last was beginning to realise that she was one, and a rather magnificent entity.

There were probably few Englishmen, even among the humblest and most lethargic, that the new wine of the age did not in some way quicken and affect. There was a rustling in the mulberry trees, a strange and mysterious movement in the air was making itself felt, and stirring men to great deeds, both in action and in thought.

A great orator of the ancient world was once asked, what was the first and greatest qualification for an orator. He answered without hesitation, "action." Being asked what was the second, he again replied "action," and when asked what was the third, he gave the same answer.

Well, "action" was the dominant note, both at home and abroad, during the Elizabethan period.

Luther abroad, if he had not broken, had undermined and impaired the power of the Papacy, and had bestowed on a large portion of mankind the inestimable blessing of free thought. Bacon at home had performed a similar service for science, and had supplemented an obsolete and somewhat discredited philosophy.

The genius of Shakespeare, then, was aided and fostered by the peculiar harmony of his nature, and by the era in which he flourished. His head and his heart were alike ready to respond to the favourable and life-giving breezes of his time. The violin was there, the musician was at hand; and the musician availed himself of his opportunity to the full.

Shakespeare was, as we have seen, in his writings at any rate, unburdened and unhindered by any painful realisation of self. He never says a word about himself, and he is apparently utterly indifferent as to what others might say about him. The most superficial reader of his works cannot but be struck

by it. He never directly preaches; he never directly moralises; he never plays to the gallery. He neither tickles the ears of the groundlings, nor does he court the approbation of the great. He never writes merely for effect, or with an eye either to the past, the the present, or the future.

And this absence of self-consciousness is a valuable asset to any man, and has carried many an otherwise mediocre personality high on the waters of life. It is especially valuable to an author; it endears him to his readers, and the more so when its possessor is a writer of commanding ability.

Shakespeare, again, was not hindered or oppressed by a superabundance of learning. The pristine richness of his brain was neither cloyed nor overpowered by the weight of extraneous matter and information. Thought impregnated its virginity, and thought alone.

He could read and write, he could think and observe: that was all his stock-in-trade, and that was enough for him. He acquired a little history from the historians, playwrights, and chroniclers of his time, which doubtless abounded in inaccuracies, but was sufficient for the purpose in hand. It is doubtful if he knew any language but his own. A smattering of French appears in his works, which may, or may not, have been supplied to him by others. His knowledge of the ancient world he is supposed to have derived from a translation of "Plutarch's Lives," current in his day.

Much learning, too great a veneration for tradition, and too excessive a deference to the stereotyped opinions of others, has stifled many a genius and marred many an otherwise fine understanding.

It is deplorable to think of the waste of brain power that went on throughout the Middle Ages. Men exercised their wits on chop logic, casuistry, and all

sorts of subtle and unfruitful speculations on fantastic theological conundrums, such as how many angels could stand on the point of a needle ; which were founded on false premises, and consequently led nowhere.

People were weary of speculating *in vacuo*. The human mind required something more substantial upon which to feed. It wanted to touch, taste, and handle the actual and positive realities of life, and that is precisely what Shakespeare did, and what he teaches others to do.

Ignorance does not often stand a man in good stead, but there are exceptions to all rules, and it did Shakespeare. Ignorance is bliss at times, but to Shakespeare it was something more, it was an unqualified blessing.

Shakespeare can hardly be said to have broken with the thought of the past, he knew so very little about it. He was no iconoclast ; he left other temples alone, but he set to work and built up one of his own, which far surpassed in magnificence anything that had hitherto been attempted.

He was not only largely instrumental in creating the English stage, and establishing the English drama on a very wholesome and certain foundation, but he may be almost said to have created the English tongue—at any rate he showed to the world what beautiful and powerful possibilities were latent in it, and what a plastic instrument it is for the instruction and delight of mankind, when manipulated by the hand of a master.

Is it possible to build up the leading qualities and characteristics of the man Shakespeare from his own writings? Read Shakespeare over and over again, and nothing is more simple ; you can put together the whole nature of the man.

The task is easy, and for this reason : Shakespeare always says what he means, and means what he says.



His language is appropriate, simple, and direct, never involved and obscure. He rarely speaks in the language of allegory or parable. There is no writer more difficult to read meanings into than he.

But before proceeding to allude to some of the peculiar and particular moral qualifications of Shakespeare, which enabled him to accomplish the great task he did, let us regard him for a moment in the double aspect of his nature.

It is the practical, positive, and efficient side of his character that discovers itself in most of his plays. But he not only lived in the world of tangible and positive fact, but in the world of the soul as well. There was a contemplative side to him as well as a practical, and this finds its fullest realisation and expression in the impersonation of two very remarkable characters, Hamlet and Prospero.

Shakespeare is Hamlet, and Hamlet Shakespeare, in certain given moods and conditions.

An immense literature has accumulated round the play of *Hamlet*, and it is not the intention of the writer—nor would it be a very profitable task—to survey the play of *Hamlet* as a whole: but there are two points or qualities attributed to Hamlet which stand out in such bold relief from his other characteristics that it is difficult to ignore them altogether and avoid devoting a word to their discussion.

The discussion need not be dry and uninteresting, as it is possible to enliven and illuminate the argument by some very beautiful quotations appropriate to it.

The two points on which most of the critics fix their attention, and are, so to speak, the two "foci" in the character of Hamlet, round which the orbit of their argument and criticism revolves, are Hamlet's imputed irresolution and his supposed insanity.

## CHAPTER V

### HAMLET

WAS Hamlet so irresolute and insane as many critics would have him appear, and did Shakespeare intend to represent him in that light?

That Shakespeare intended, in his delineation of Hamlet, to depict a character at once sensitive, intellectual, with a philosophic bent, and a strong tinge of melancholy, given to reflection, and with a moral rectitude superior to those who surrounded him, may be readily admitted. A character of such a composition is usually, if not invariably, irresolute when suddenly confronted with an occasion that calls for immediate action and decision.

Great thought and prompt decision are rarely found united in the same individual.

But did Hamlet display anywhere in the play this irresolution so frequently imputed to him? and was it inaction and a want of decision on his part that was the cause of his failure and undoing?

Let us ask the reader, if he has not already done so, to read the play carefully through, if possible with the clear and steadfast eyes of Shakespeare himself, without bias, and without prepossession. If he will do so he will find it very difficult to discover when and where Hamlet fails to rise to the emergency: on the contrary, he meets all emergencies as they arise very cleverly indeed.



It must be remembered that Hamlet was in a very difficult position. For look at the situation. He stands utterly alone, without a friend of any sort, with the exception of the steadfast and noble-hearted Horatio, doubtless an invaluable ally at a practical pinch, but hardly the right person to render to Hamlet any very efficient guidance or support in the peculiar circumstances in which he finds himself.

Hamlet's own words to Horatio:—

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy,”

may or may not bear a double signification, but they show that Hamlet was quite aware that Horatio had his limitations.

Hamlet is heir to a kingdom, and on the steps of a throne, based on a very insecure and rotten foundation. The murder of his father, the king, to whom he was devoted, deprived him at a blow of the prop and mainstay of his life, and the state of its chief pillar and support. Hamlet is awakened with startling abruptness to his own isolation and the stern realities of life, and is thrown back violently on himself, confronted with a very intricate and difficult problem to unravel and disentangle if he can.

Now, many of the very greatest critics, numbering among them such eminent names as Goethe, Schlegel, and Coleridge, persist in their opinion that Hamlet is intended by Shakespeare to represent a man overcome by the consequences of his own irresolution.

But their reasons for this attributed irresolution differ. Goethe attributes it to the weak moral nature of and lack of fibre in the man. In the following well-known passage he analyses with considerable insight and power the character of Hamlet. It is taken from

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Carlyle's translation).

“ ‘The time is out of joint : O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right !’

“In these words, I imagine, will be found the key to Hamlet's whole procedure. To me it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it. In this view the whole piece seems to me to be composed. There is an oak-tree planted in a costly jar, which should have borne only pleasant flowers in its bosom ; the roots expand, the jar is shivered.

“A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away. All duties are holy for him ; the present is too hard. Impossibilities have been required of him ; not in themselves impossibilities, but such for him. He winds, and turns, and torments himself ; he advances and recoils ; is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind ; at last does all but lose his purpose from his thoughts ; yet still without recovering his peace of mind.”

This sounds very plausible and beautiful ; but is it altogether true ? One would like to ask, what was “the great action laid on his soul” that was so imperatively required of Hamlet ? Again, “impossibilities have been required of him, not in themselves impossibilities.” But that is the whole point. They were impossibilities ! For what could Hamlet have done ? He might, of course, after the half-savage manner of Othello, have plunged a dagger into the heart of the murderers. But then Hamlet would not have been Hamlet, and the play would have been

cut short at the outset. The fault really lies with Shakespeare for placing Hamlet in an impossible position, from which, either with or without resolution, there was no satisfactory outlet or escape.

Coleridge and Schlegel take an almost identical, but somewhat different view. They both attribute this supposed want of decision on Hamlet's part, to use Hamlet's own words,

"to thinking too precisely on the event."

"The whole," wrote Schlegel, "is intended to show that a calculating consideration which exhausts all the relations and possible consequences of a deed, must cripple the power of acting." Coleridge says that in Hamlet we see "a great, an almost enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it."

But again one asks, what could Hamlet do? A man naturally shrinks from murdering his mother, however wicked she may be; he might have killed his uncle, it is true; but it must be remembered that until quite late in the play he had no material evidence on which to act, and he would have been accused at once, by the entire population, of having killed the king that he might himself ascend the throne.

It is true that this course of action did enter his mind, and he had one splendid opportunity.

He stumbles across the king, who was at his prayers, and soliloquising in a fit of remorse. His prayers apparently were not very effectual, for on rising from his knees he says:—

"*King.* My words fly up, my thoughts remain below ;  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

"*Ham.* Now might I do it pat, now he is praying ;  
And now I'll do't ; and so he goes to heaven ;  
And so am I revenged."

But Hamlet hesitates and loses his opportunity

A sort of religious fear and superstition stays his hand. Hamlet was one of those natures with a religious temperament without any very fixed religious opinions.

He reasons in this way : if I kill my uncle now, his prayers may be his salvation ; he shall not escape to heaven by that road, if I can help it.

“ No !

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent ;  
When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage,  
At game, a-swearing, or about some act  
That has no relish of salvation in't.  
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven  
And that his soul may be as damned and black  
As hell, whereto it goes.”

This is the only opportunity for action that Hamlet can be said to have let slip, and his motives for refraining from the deed were probably mixed.

For the rest, throughout the play, with considerable promptitude, discretion, and decision, and with no small ability, he meets the emergencies as they arise.

Before his interview with the ghost of his father, his “ prophetic soul ” had its suspicions of the true state of the case, and how does he behave immediately after the interview, when the ghost bids him adieu, and has unfolded his terrible story ? Does it completely unnerve him ? Does he rave or fall to the ground ? Not at all. He pulls himself together and says :—

“ *Ham.* O all you host of heaven ! O earth ! What else ?  
And shall I couple hell ? O, fie ! Hold, hold, my heart ;  
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee !  
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe.”

It will be observed that the ghost, in its parting

harangue, gives Hamlet no directions whatever as to the line his revenge should take.

“ *Ghost.* But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught : leave her to heaven  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her.”

He, at any rate, forms one resolution in his mind, the motive of which appears hereafter, and which he adumbrates to Horatio.

“ *Ham.* How strange or odd soe’er I bear myself,  
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an *antic* disposition on.”

This is a hint to Horatio that he intends to emphasise the madness already imputed to him, for his own purposes, which will hereafter appear. In short, he intends to feign madness.

But emotional and superstitious as Hamlet was, even the ghost fails to convince him absolutely of his uncle’s guilt. He was greatly awed and impressed by its appearance, but a doubt still lingers in his mind. Might not this ghost after all be a creature of his own disordered imagination, and an emissary of Satan to mislead him ?

“ *Ham.* The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil : and the devil hath power  
To assume a pleasing shape ; yea, and perhaps  
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me : I’ll have grounds  
More relative than this.”

He will bide his time, and wait for some further and more reliable evidence. He sees his opportunity for further strengthening his opinion by the appearance on the scene of a company of players. It suddenly suggests itself to Hamlet that they are the very instrument ready to his hands, either to confirm or weaken in his mind the guilt of the King and

Queen. Hamlet himself alters the play, to suit the circumstances of the case.

" *Ham.* Follow him, friends : we'll hear a play to-morrow. Dost thou hear me, old friend ; can you play the Murder of Gonzago ?

*First Player.* Ay, my lord.

*Ham.* We'll ha't to-morrow night. You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in't, could you not ?

*First Player.* Ay, my lord."

Doubtless "the speech" refers to the poisoning in the garden scene. It was written by Hamlet himself with the express purpose of entrapping his uncle and strengthening the evidence against him. If the King quails, turns pale, or quits the scene, then surely he is guilty. He bids Horatio watch him closely.

" *Ham.* Give him heedful note ;  
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,  
And after we will both our judgments join  
In censure of his meaning."

The result is as Hamlet expected.

" *Oph.* The king rises.

*Ham.* What, frightened with false fire ?

*Pol.* Give o'er the play.

*King.* Give me some light away !

*Ham.* O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for  
A thousand pound. Didst perceive ?

*Hor.* Very well, my lord."

Hamlet is convinced ; he has no longer any doubt that the whole story of the ghost is true. He hastens to the Queen's chamber, accuses her of her infidelity and complicity in the deed, and in measured but very terrible words drives home the charge against her. She pretends at first to be dumbfounded.

" *Queen.* What have I done, that thou darest wag thy  
tongue,  
In noise so rude against me ? "

But Hamlet is undeterred: he becomes more vehement than ever.

*Queen.* This is the very coinage of your brain.  
This bodiless creation ecstasy  
Is very cunning in.

*Ham.* Ecstasy!  
My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,  
And makes as healthful music.  
Mother, for love of grace,  
Lay not the flattering unction to your soul,  
That not your trespass but my madness speaks."

The Queen is overcome at last and practically confesses everything.

*Queen.* O, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain."

After this interview the King's eyes are completely opened. He had been apprehensive all along as to the true meaning of Hamlet's distraction. He sees danger to himself, and Hamlet at all costs must be got out of the way. So he places him practically under the arrest of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two courtiers, and spongers, on the King, but false friends to Hamlet.

Hamlet is shipped to England under their supervision, with a secret commission from the King to the British authorities that Hamlet is to be in some way removed, or at any rate not allowed to return.

Hamlet is alive to the motive and suspects the commission.

*Ham.* There's letters sealed; and my two schoolfellows  
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,  
They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,  
And marshall me to knavery. Let it work;  
For 'tis sport to have the engineer  
Hoist with his own petard; and 't shall go hard  
But I will delve one yard below their mines  
And blow them at the moon. O, 'tis most sweet,  
When in one line two crafts directly meet."

Hamlet gets access to the sealed letters, and alters the commission in his own favour.



It will be observed that it is Hamlet who is the moving spirit in all this. It is he who interviews the ghost, he who devises the play, he himself who charges his mother, he who tampers with the letters, he who stabs Polonius and finally executes justice on the King. What more could he do? And wherein lies the charge of irresolution?

Professor Dowden with his usual discernment clearly sees all this, but he fails to be entirely convinced. He says :—

“It has been said, that in spite of difficulties without, and inward difficulties, he still clings to his terrible duty—letting it go indeed for a time, but in returning to it again, and in the end accomplishing it—implies strength. He is not incapable of vigorous action—if only he be allowed no chance of thinking the fact away into an idea. He is the first to board the pirate: he stabs Polonius through the arras; he suddenly alters the sealed commission, and sends his schoolfellows to the English headsman; he finally executes justice upon the King. But all his action is sudden and fragmentary; it is not continuous and coherent.”

But why is it sudden and fragmentary, and not continuous and coherent? Surely the answer is evident. The revelation of the facts themselves is not continuous, and the evidence only unfolds itself by degrees. Till the evidence is complete, Hamlet himself would have been a murderer, had he slain his uncle.

No wonder poor Hamlet, situated as he was, and surrounded by enemies, complained at times of being heavy and indisposed.

“*Ham.* I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging



firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man ! how noble in reason ! how infinite in faculty ! in form and moving how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a god ! the beauty of the world ! the paragon of animals ! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust ? man delights not me : no, nor woman either, though by your smiling you seem to say so."

And again, in lamenting his mother's treachery, he gives vent to the following outburst :—

" *Ham.* O, that this too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew !  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter ! O God ! God !  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world !  
Fie on't ! ah fie ! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed ; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. That it should come to this !  
But two months dead ! nay, not so much, not two :  
So excellent a king ; that was, to this,  
Hyperion to a satyr ; so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth !  
Must I remember ? why, she would hang on him,  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on : and yet, within a month—  
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman !—  
A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she—  
O God ! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,  
Would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle,  
My father's brother, but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules : within a month :  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets !  
It is not nor it cannot come to good :  
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue."

So much for Hamlet's irresolution.

But to turn for a moment to the much vexed and debated question of Hamlet's imputed madness. Did Shakespeare intend to represent Hamlet as

insane? No, most certainly not! Of course, a great deal turns on what is meant by insanity. One may roughly define it as an accentuated departure either in morals, or in intellect, from the normal standard, and the further the needle recedes from that standard, the more pronounced is the insanity. But still that does not enlighten us as to what madness is. To know what madness is, one must have experienced it oneself. Polonius more truly hits the nail on the head when he says:—

“ Mad call I it ; for to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad ?  
But let that go.”

There are moments in the lives of all of us, or most of us, when a little supervision and restraint, medical or otherwise, may be salutary and efficacious. But Hamlet, sensitive nature though he was, and placed in a terrible dilemma, did not need even that. What does he himself say about this imputed madness?

“*Ham.* I am but mad north-north west : when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw.”

As much as to say, I am distraught about one thing, but for the rest my reason is sound enough.

And again:—

“ I am essentially not in madness, but mad in craft.  
Mother, for love of grace,  
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,  
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.”

Of course it is to the advantage of his enemies to assert his madness, which they accordingly do. But they all of them have good idea of the true nature of his malady and what really afflicted him.

Polonius was right when he said there was method in his madness.

The King himself had a pretty good inkling as to the true state of the case.

“ *King.* What he spake though it lacked form a little,  
Was not like madness. There is something in his soul  
O’er which his melancholy sits on brood.”

No! Hamlet was not mad, but he feigned to be mad, another proof of his sanity, for no insane person would feign madness; but feign it he unquestionably did. And why did he feign it? There was method in this pretence as we shall presently see.

It is strange, but many critics miss the mark here, and among them no less an authority, acute and discerning critic though he is, than Professor Dowden.

What does he say of, and how does he account for, this feigned madness?

“It is now in a sudden inspiration of excited feeling that Hamlet conceives the possibility of his assuming an antic disposition. What is Hamlet’s purpose in this? He finds that he is involuntarily conducting himself in a wild and unintelligible fashion. He has escaped ‘from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous — a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium.’ His mind struggles ‘to resume its accustomed course, and effect a dominion over the awful shapes and sounds that have usurped its sovereignty.’ He assumes madness as a means of concealing his actual disturbance of mind. His over-excitability may betray him; but if it be a received opinion that his mind is unhinged, such an access of over-excitement will pass unobserved and unstudied.”

But surely the Professor in this explanation misses the purpose and object of Hamlet’s assumed madness. It may partly account for it, but at the best it is a very inadequate and unsatisfactory solution.

There was method in Hamlet's madness, here as elsewhere. The reason is at first sight hidden, but if one reflects for a moment, and reads the play with attention, it soon becomes apparent.

His object is, to be rid of Ophelia, and break his affianced connection. He was in love with Ophelia, or had been after the manner of youth, and was in a way probably in love with her still. But he sees that Ophelia, situated as he was amid many difficulties and with stern realities to contend with, was no fit mate for himself, that his love for her was merely a surface and passing affection, without depth, and without hope of increase or endurance. He realised that Ophelia, however pretty, was after all but a very shadowy and unsubstantial virgin, weak, submissive, and colourless. There could be no hope of permanent happiness there. So he determines to break with her; but how could he do it, with dignity to himself, and without wounding too deeply the susceptibilities of the girl? He will pretend to be outrageously mad, and Ophelia herself will see the hopelessness of any union between them, and will herself put an end to their engagement.

This is obviously his reason, for why is it that he only feigns this accentuated form of madness in the presence of Ophelia, or when she is in the neighbourhood or under discussion?

Almost immediately after his encounter with the ghost, he rushes into her presence in a very dishevelled and disorderly condition, and behaves in a manner that ladies in their most gracious mood call "extraordinary, and unaccountable."

*Oph.* O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted !

*Pol.* With what i' the name of God ?

*Oph.* My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced ;  
No hat upon his head ; his stockings foul'd,  
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle ;  
Pale as his shirt ; his knees knocking each other,

And with a look, so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.

*Pol.* What said he ?

*Oph.* He took me by the wrist, and held me hard ;  
Then goes he to the length of all his arm ;  
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face  
As he would draw it."

He endeavours to make a new study of her, through her eyes, and to discover there, whether she had a nature equal to his own. He finds that she has not. He sees there only fear. Poor Ophelia, she really believes that her lover is mad, and breaks out into the following lamentation :—

" O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown !  
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword ;  
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
The observed of all observers, quite quite down  
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,  
That sucked the honey of his music vows,  
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason  
Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh ;  
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth  
Blasted with ecstasy : O woe is me,  
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see."

But there was another motive in the mind of Hamlet than that of waning love, that prompted him to break his connection with Ophelia. Hamlet was of an emotional, mercurial, and elastic disposition ; elated one day and dejected the next, he had been inexpressibly shocked at the revelation of his mother's double guilt, and was for the moment averse to, and disgusted with, the whole race of women. " Frailty, thy name is woman," he claims. Henceforth he will be a bachelor, and all women shall remain unwed. He bids Ophelia betake herself to a nunnery.

" *Ham.* Get thee to a nunnery : why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners ? I am myself indifferent honest ; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me : I am very proud, revengeful,

ambitious ; with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven ? We are arrant knaves all ; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father ?

*Oph.* At home, my lord.

*Ham.* Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in 's own house. Farewell.

*Oph.* O, help him, you sweet heavens !

*Ham.* If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry : be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go : farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool ; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go ; and quickly too. Farewell."

But there is worse to come : it is poor Ophelia, and not Hamlet, that goes really mad. Hamlet's feigned madness finds its reality in her. Her mind, never very vigorous, breaks down at the sight of her insane lover. Her speech becomes fragmentary and irrelevant. She sings snatches of strange songs.

" *Oph.* (sings). How should I your true love know  
     From another one ?  
 By his cockle hat and staff  
     And his sandal shoon.  
 He is dead and gone, lady,  
     He is dead and gone ;  
 At his head a grass green turf,  
     At his heels a stone."

And so she puts an end to herself by drowning.

" There is a willow grows aslant a brook,  
 That shows its hoar leaves in the glassy stream.  
 There with fantastic garlands did she come."

What a sad and beautiful picture do these words present to the mind. We see the fair girl with the garland on her brow, floating downward, downward, downward, in the watery embraces of the stream of death. Her face perchance is turned toward the setting sun, or towards the evening star. The cool waters of the stream lap her face, the evening breeze moves her hair. But she, she is no longer here. The



cup of life which she had as yet hardly tasted is already dashed from her lips. Out of the eternal silence she had come, and into it she has already returned again.

Truly, Hamlet had at one time or another enough to endure. He had contemplated suicide himself. In that immortal soliloquy, where he balances the advantages of life and death, the scale seems very nearly to have dipped the wrong way.

“ *Ham.* To be, or not to be : that is the question :  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them ? To die : to sleep ;  
No more ; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep ;  
To sleep : perchance to dream : ay, there's the rub ;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause : there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life ;  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin ? who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of ?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all ;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action. Soft you now !  
The fair Ophelia ! Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember'd.”

But perhaps some reader would retort, that if this were really so, if Hamlet had truly lost his love for Ophelia, and wished their engagement at an end,

why did he pour forth such a flood of grief at her funeral, and exhibit such genuine woe?

*"Ham.* What is he whose grief  
Bears such an emphasis? Whose phrase of sorrow  
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand  
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,  
Hamlet the Dane."

*"Ham.* I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum."

To the student of human nature, and of the human heart, this outburst is not at all unnatural, nor inconsistent with his previous resolution. It is true he takes a sort of header into the grave of Ophelia and engages in a rather unseemly scuffle with Laertes. He loudly protests both his affection and his grief. He did love Ophelia, and in a way he may have loved her still. Her death would naturally be a great shock to him, and remorse was doubtless largely mingled with it, for he must have been aware that he himself was the cause, though unwittingly, of her terrible and untimely end.

Hamlet's is doubtless a somewhat mysterious and fascinating character, and Shakespeare intended that it should be so. But do not many critics mystify the mist unnecessarily, possibly to show their own ingenuity in dispersing it? They stumble over his character in a manner uncalled for, and if they do not exactly make a mountain out of a mole-hill, they mistake but too often an irregular and picturesque peak on the mountain side for the mountain range itself. One cannot, of course at once fathom all the "stops" of Hamlet, nor decipher at a glance the heart of the mystery.

The character of Hamlet is by no means so unique and uncommon as many would have us believe. Hamlets are to be discovered, and sometimes in the back streets of almost every city in the world. It is the



peculiar circumstances and surroundings, the picturesque and royal setting, that so largely make the Hamlet of Shakespeare hold the mind and rivet the attention.

Beautiful and entrancing as the play is, adorned with some of the finest soliloquies ever penned, and carrying with it an air of distinction unusual even with Shakespeare, when one has read it, surveyed it, and put it down, one asks oneself the question, what is the meaning and purpose of it all, and what lesson, if any, does it intend to convey?

There can be but one answer to that, the portrayal of the character of Hamlet himself. Hamlet stands alone in the limelight, a brilliant and solitary figure, all the other characters though they have their uses are but foils and a background to emphasise his personality.

As the play draws to a conclusion, it becomes more and more confused, and is evidently hurried at the finish. Shakespeare himself is at a loss to know how to disperse the company, so he destroys them all at a sweep; they all either kill themselves, or each other. (A dead march, *exeunt*, bearing off the dead bodies.)

From one point of view, Hamlet may be regarded as Shakespeare's only mistake. In representing Hamlet Shakespeare has been guilty of an unpardonable error; he has presented every crank, every critic, every mystery monger, and every faddist in the world with a golden opportunity. Here is the "true inwardness" with a vengeance, the very character they required. Hamlet is the only satisfactory hare in Shakespeare, the only one, at any rate, that will give them a good run for their money, so the whole critical pack, English, German, and what not, are in full cry after this very illusive and inexplicable creature. Is Hamlet fish, fowl, or good red herring? They are all of them at their wit's end to decide.

## CHAPTER VI

### SHAKESPEARE: SOME CHARACTERISTICS

THAT Shakespeare had an extraordinary physique of unusual balance and health, there is little room for doubt. It is a common-place and well-recognised maxim, especially in these days, that the mind reacts on the body, and the body on the mind—if there is any difference between the two. The one cannot attain its maximum of efficiency without the other. This extraordinary sanity of Shakespeare's reveals itself everywhere in his works. There is no lopsidedness in him, one part of his intellect does not bulge out, and exhaust itself at the expense of the rest. He is not only good all round, but a good all round specialist. In other words, he excels in and adorns everything he touches.

The majority of great thinkers and writers, usually excel in one direction alone, and they obtain not infrequently a recognition beyond their merits, due to this very cause. They work at, and develop some especial quality in their nature, until its very exaggeration and eccentricity attracts attention; and though they are never universal favourites, yet they have their following, limited no doubt, but still considerable from generation to generation; and strange to say this success is frequently not to be attributed to any excellence in their natures, but rather to some defect. Take, for instance, the case of Swift. For

his success and popularity among a certain class, he was indebted to his unbridled and savage satire, unquestionably the result of an affected spleen, or of some it may have been intermittent, but still peculiar form of dementia.

Carlyle owes his notoriety and popularity very largely to the fact that he was the fortunate, or unfortunate possessor as the case may be, of a dyspeptic and disordered stomach.

De Quincey and Coleridge were both of them notoriously addicted to opium, and though by nature men of great gifts, yet some of the more lurid and startling passages in their works can undoubtedly be traced to its influence.

Or again, look at Voltaire, and all that are of his household and lineage, the scorn and malice of their brains are by no means the children of corrective benevolence, but are rather to be attributed to some discord in their composition, the parent of jealousy and self-conceit.

This cynical school of writers may have their attraction for a certain age, and a certain class, but they can hardly be very enduring or general favourites, from the fact that when the objects, circumstances, and people against whom the shafts of their satire are directed have disappeared, nothing but barren ill-nature remains visible.

The only writers that have a chance of abiding immortally are those like Shakespeare himself, full of the milk of human kindness and geniality ; such as Virgil among the ancients ; Goethe and Schiller in Germany ; Charles Dickens in England ; and St Augustine, Pascal, and Fenelon among the theologians.

There is no bitterness in Shakespeare ; he is never malicious, and rarely cynical, though he sometimes

indulges in a light-hearted and airy satire, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Now this extraordinary sanity of Shakespeare's, this healthiness of mind and body, was the parent and foster-mother of many subordinate virtues, which we purpose immediately to notice in detail. They are important, as they all contributed and had their share in making Shakespeare's creations as splendid as they are.

They do not merely exist in the fancy and imagination of the writer, but are qualities that can be honestly attributed to Shakespeare himself, as they are apparent in all his utterances, and reveal themselves in almost every line that he penned.

A perfectly sane and healthy nature is usually large-hearted and sympathetic, and Shakespeare's sympathy takes cognisance of, and envelops in a sort of huge and all-embracing loving-kindness, everything in the animate and inanimate creation.

It is unnecessary to dilate upon his great powers as a painter of Nature. One quotation from his sonnets alone will suffice; comment on it is impossible, its eulogy is in itself.

“ Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;  
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride  
With ugly rack on his celestial face,  
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.”

If Shakespeare could sympathise with Nature in one aspect so truly and deeply as that, he could do so in all, and he does it; as those who will take the pains to read him will discover for themselves.

And so it is with every living thing, even the poor beetle is not beneath his recognition—

“ The sense of death is most in apprehension  
And the poor beetle that we tread upon  
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great  
As when a giant dies.”

He has been rightly called the “gentle Shakespeare” ; he can be gentle to the weak as well as to the strong. Notwithstanding his own brilliant and powerful personality, he can sympathise with weakness even in a king. Towards the irresolute and sentimental, if saintly, Henry VI., banded about and perplexed by a set of turbulent and truculent nobles, and a mere child in the hands of his masterful and ambitious wife, Margaret of Anjou, he extends a sort of motherly pity and commiseration. Even “evil” itself comes in for a word of praise :—

“ There is a soul of goodness in things evil.”

Truly if :—

“ He liveth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small,”

then Shakespeare must have lived exceedingly well.

But there is one omission for which it is difficult to forgive even Shakespeare.

“ ’Tis true, ’tis pity, and pity ’tis, ’tis true.”

He has never a good word for the dog. Whenever he mentions the word “dog,” which he frequently does, he invariably uses it as a term either of opprobrium or reproach.

This can only be accounted for by the fact either that Shakespeare never had a dog of his own, or if he did was unfortunate in its selection ; or that the dogs in the days of Elizabeth were merely utilised for purposes of protection, or for the chase, and regarded as more or less akin to the wild beasts, and had not as yet been promoted to the society and companionship of man.

It is true that there is the celebrated Launce and his dog Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, but Launce regards Crab rather as a compliment to his own oddities than as a friend, and does not give him a very good character.

“ I think my dog Crab, the sourest natured dog that lives.”

Universal and generalising minds, especially when gifted with great powers of imagination are usually in a hurry—eager and impatient. But this is not so with Shakespeare, his patience is infinite. He will elaborate, if necessary, a person, a situation, or even a dress with great nicety and exactness.

No one knew better than Shakespeare that a man does not attain the universal by abandoning the particular. Look with what fidelity and care he describes the stallion in *Venus and Adonis*, its appearance, its motion, its action. Or look with what delicacy, detail, and felicity he draws the portrait of Mab, the queen of the fairies. The quotation is so hackneyed that one is almost ashamed to reproduce it, but the reader must remember that this book is intended for the uninitiated and not for those learned in Shakespearian lore :—

“ *Mer.* O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
 She is the fairies’ midwife ; and she comes  
 In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
 On the forefinger of an alderman,  
 Drawn with a team of little atomies  
 Athwart men’s noses as they lie asleep :  
 Her wagon-spokes made of long spinners’ legs ;  
 The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers ;  
 The traces, of the smallest spider’s web ;  
 The collars, of the moonshine’s watery beams ;  
 Her whip, of cricket’s bone ; the lash, of film ;  
 Her wagoner, a small grey-coated gnat,  
 Not half so big as a round little worm  
 Prick’d from the lazy finger of a maid ;  
 Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,  
 Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,  
 Time out o’ mind the fairies’ coachmakers.



And in this state she gallops night by night  
 Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love ;  
 O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight ;  
 O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees ;  
 O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,—  
 Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,  
 Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are :  
 Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,  
 And then dreams he of smelling out a suit ;  
 And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail  
 Tickling a parson's nose as 'a lies asleep,  
 Then dreams he of another benefice :  
 Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,  
 And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,  
 Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,  
 Of healths five-fathom deep ; and then anon  
 Drums in his ear, at which he starts, and wakes ;  
 And, being thus frightened, swears a prayer or two,  
 And sleeps again."

And this patience is matched by his self-control, a self-control quite unusual, not only over his pen, but over his own person.

Read *Venus and Adonis*, a study of female lust rejected by a beautiful and disdainful boy. Shakespeare with his fine physique, his healthy passion, and vivid imagination — and remember he was but a youth — would one have thought, have been captivated, captured, and overpowered by the very subject he depicted. But this is not the case, he is master of his imagination, not his imagination of him.

On this subject Professor Dowden makes the following very just observation :—

"In holding the subject before his imagination, Shakespeare is perfectly cool and collected. He has made choice of the subject, and he is interested in doing his duty by it in the most thorough way a young poet can, but he remains unimpassioned—intent wholly upon setting down the right colour and lines upon his canvas."

He never lets his genius run away with him. From the first to the last he has his team well in hand.



Though the pace is at times tremendous his hands are on the reins ; he drives straight on through the path he has elected to pursue, down into the deep valleys of passion, through the morasses of bloodshed, through the mists of thought and up again on to the high tablelands of the battlefield, and the vivid action of life ; through the fields of abundance and plenty, past the rippling brooks of laughter and of joy, through the meads of the fairies and the woodlands full of flowers and singing birds, until he reaches his journey's end, without hurry, without stumble, and without disaster.

It is wonderful ! His temperature is always normal, his pulse rarely irregular. Truly he is "of imagination all compact."

But there is another gift for which Shakespeare is conspicuous. He had a wonderful ear for the music and disposition of words.

In this he is unsurpassed by any writer, ancient or modern ; he stands unrivalled and alone. He was probably musical in the strict sense of the word, with a good ear for sound, for his lyrics are among the most beautiful in the English language. But if he had not music in his ear, as many a man has not, he had it in *himself*. The distinction is subtle and worthy of Shakespeare :—

" The man that hath no music in himself  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night  
And his affections dark as Erebus  
Let no such man be trusted."

This quotation shows with what aptitude and care Shakespeare chose his words to fit the thought.

Indeed so wonderfully does every word find its place, and so exactly suited is it to the sentiment he wishes to express, that it would be difficult for

the most exact and fastidious of critics ever to substitute a better word for the one employed. His words invariably ring true and always serve to emphasise, enrich, and vitalise the picture.

Shakespeare is, moreover, a great colourist, as well as a great draughtsman, and he makes use of the metaphor for this end.

He says in *Macbeth* :—

“ Here lay Duncan,  
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood.”

By his use of the metaphors “silver” and “gold,” he greatly enhances the picture, and brings more powerfully before the eye the slain body of the man. And how perfectly does the word “lace” fit the line! “Streaked” would have done, an inferior writer might have used it, but it is not so good. “Lace” exactly describes the network that trickling blood forms on a body.

Or again, take that wonderful speech of Macbeth's.

“ *Macb.* To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow  
Creeps in this petty pace, from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time ;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools,  
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle !  
Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more : it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing.”

Mark the word “dusty.” Shakespeare probably had in his mind the words of Scripture, “Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return.” Or again that line—

“ The rainy marching in the painful field.”

How much more forcible is that, than the “painful marching in the rainy field?”

He never errs, and, what is still more astonishing, there is apparently no effort about it. The words

burst out as in a torrent; he can hardly keep them back, he seems at times almost choked in his effort to retain them; and yet there they all are, always true, apt, and felicitous.

Or again, look at his "buoyancy." Buoyancy is a peculiar excellence in Shakespeare; it usually escapes comment or notice, and has been considerably overlooked; and yet this gay and buoyant spirit is always in the atmosphere, it surrounds, and permeates almost all that he dilates upon, and imparts to it a feeling of exhilaration, as the salt of the water does to the bather in the sea.

" Your merry heart goes all the day,  
Your sad tires in a mile-o."

No matter how gloomy the theme, how deep the tragedy, how terrible the anguish and despair, how cruel the infliction of the wound, Shakespeare's bright spirit seems to bid one take heart, and his buoyant nature is all round about, to soothe and draw back again from excess of emotion the wounded feelings of his audience.

He is severe on melancholy. This is strange, as melancholy is, as a rule, a favourite with the Muse.

" Turn melancholy forth to funerals."

" With green and yellow melancholy."

" Lumpish, heavy melancholy."

" Dull-eyed melancholy,"

and so forth.

And Milton, who in point of time follows close on Shakespeare, treats "melancholy" in the same strain, and even with greater severity. This one would hardly have expected, as the cast of Milton's mind was reflective and pensive, his imagination, though warm and brilliant, yet classical and severe, and perhaps rather overweighted with a stern, unaccommodating, and

heavy Puritan blend, doubtless lightened and made palatable by the yeast of his genius. He opens *L'Allegro* with the following condemnatory lines. He was not, it must be borne in mind, blind when he wrote them, as he became later on, or he might have treated this black and beautiful disease, if disease it be, with greater leniency and consideration,

“Hence loathed Melancholy,  
Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born,  
In Stygian cave forlorn,  
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!  
Find out some uncouth cell,  
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,  
And the night-raven sings:  
There, under ebon shades, and low-brow'd rocks as ragged as  
thy locks,  
The dark Armenian desert ever dwell.”

Melancholy was not the note of the Elizabethan age. That age was more akin to life than death, and consequently melancholy was an unwelcome guest.

But in the Victorian age it is different; melancholy is rather a favourite, and made much of by poets and prose writers alike. Indeed, so much was it in request that the quality of genius has been withheld from many writers on account of its absence from their works. Macaulay is never allowed to be a poetical genius for this very reason, though his *Lays of Ancient Rome* are as true and fine poetry as any in the English tongue; they are spirited and beautiful throughout, but “My Lady Melancholy” is not there, and so they are not the children of genius. Byron was the great or pretended apostle of affliction and despair, but it was largely assumed or affected, and the child rather of iniquity than of any divine discontent.

Of course gentle melancholy does lend a great charm and sweetness to a certain class of poetry; it is true

to reality, but is in fellowship with death rather than life—the attendant handmaid of the shades of night.

Three of the greatest odes in the English, and perhaps in any language, owe their attraction and abiding influence to this very quality. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* depicts the melancholy of passing and departed things.

In Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* we find the great sad riddle of the universe, "the trailing clouds of glory," the "setting suns," and so forth; and in Gray's *Elegy* is set forth the even and uneventful passing from the cradle to the grave.

Charles Dickens was greatly affected by the malady; for underlying and overlying his fund of humour and of mirth, sometimes subdued, sometimes boisterous and rollicking, the perpetual moaning of this sad wind of life is ever in one's ears with its message of disaster and despair.

But we must remember that Charles Dickens was in a way a child of sorrow, sad in his nativity, sad in his upbringing and surroundings; what wonder that this sadness is reflected in his works! He saw the squalor of the underworld, he lived with it, he sympathised with it, and in a way he almost loved it, whereas Shakespeare kept his eyes fixed on the fair plains and mountain tops of the panorama of life. Dickens was in love with sorrow, and one does get in love with it. Some natures are never happy in its absence.

Shakespeare in a few lines could draw a masterly picture of the physical appearance of a man. His portrait of Hamlet's father is indelible, and never to be forgotten.

"*Ham.* Look here, upon this picture, and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
See, what a grace was seated on his brow;  
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,  
 A station like the herald Mercury  
 New lighted on a heaven kissing hill ;  
 A combination and a form indeed,  
 Where every God did seem to set his seal  
 To give the world assurance of a man."

We have reviewed, then, many of Shakespeare's qualities; his sanity, his loving-kindness, his patience, his self-control, the buoyancy of his nature, and his musical ear. Of his intellectual powers, of the exuberance of his imagination, of his immense and all-embracing mind, it is unnecessary to dilate upon; they sufficiently reveal themselves, and are manifest in all he wrote. And when we remember that Shakespeare always says what he means, and means what he says, that his language is, as a rule, simple, appropriate, and direct, rarely involved and obscure, it is not so very difficult very largely to reconstruct the entire moral nature of the man.

This is not to assert that Shakespeare had not many faults, and was a weak and wicked being like the rest of us. But the essence of his nature was sound, whatever temporary and accidental delinquencies he may have been guilty of. And there is all the difference between accident and essence in human character. Nor is it to assert that he had exhausted the possibilities of literature. Of course he had not! But he had carried to a point, which is difficult to excel, the almost perfect portrayal of every subject on which he treats.

But there is another way of endeavouring to discover Shakespeare. It has been attempted by many, and from its nature must be largely conjectural, but it is plausible, has its fascinations, and doubtless contains within it a large element of truth.

Are there any characters in Shakespeare that he

deliberately intends to be impersonations of himself, or rather of himself at the time he composed them. Of course there is a shadowy way in which he reveals himself in all. It must be so.

The characters sometimes fixed upon as self-portraits or revelations are Henry V. in the play of that name, and Prospero in *The Tempest*. The former is taken to represent Shakespeare in his maturity, the latter in his more advanced years.



## CHAPTER VII

### HENRY V.

THERE can be very little doubt that the character of Henry V. was a great favourite with Shakespeare. He was his ideal of a man and a king, and he bestows on him all the qualifications necessary for the kingly office. Shakespeare draws out and elaborates his character with great care, following in rough outline the accredited account of the historians. Henry appears in three plays, as Prince of Wales—or Prince Hal, as Shakespeare is fond of calling him—in the first and second part of *King Henry IV.*, and as King of England in *Henry V.* He is evidently more in love with and attracted to this particular creation than to any other in his works. He traces his whole career from early manhood to his grave, at great length, and shows him in all his moods of buffoonery and reflection, of action and thought, of merriment and sorrow. He paints him as a wayward and pleasure-loving, but still enterprising prince; as a soldier, statesman, and monarch; brilliant, thoughtful, and effective, and with a practical capacity both in peace and in war, such as few kings have been endowed with. And in the opening scene of *Henry VI.*, when his favourite is dead, he parts with him with reluctance and makes no less than four of the great nobles of England pronounce on him their various eulogies.

" *Bed.* Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night !  
Comets, importing change of times and states,  
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,  
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars  
That have consented unto Henry's death !  
Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long !  
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.

*Glo.* England ne'er had a king until his time.  
Virtue he had, deserving to command :  
His brandish'd sword did blind men with his beams ;  
His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings ;  
His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,  
More dazzled and drove back his enemies  
Than mid-day sun fierce bent against their faces.  
What should I say ? his deeds exceed all speech :  
He ne'er lift up his hand, but conquerèd.

*Exe.* We mourn in black : why mourn we not in blood ?  
Henry is dead, and never shall revive :  
Upon a wooden coffin we attend ;  
And death's dishonourable victory  
We with our stately presence glorify,  
Like captives bound to a triumphant car.  
What ! shall we curse the planets of mishap  
That plotted thus our glory's overthrow ?  
Or shall we think the subtle-witted French  
Conjurers and sorcerers, that, afraid of him,  
By magic verses have contriv'd his end ?

*Win.* He was a king bless'd of the King of kings  
Unto the French the dreadful judgment-day  
So dreadful will not be as was his sight."

It seems impossible that Shakespeare could have written of Henry V., as he did, unless their characters very largely corresponded, and unless there were many and great affinities between the two. Shakespeare is evidently not painting Henry from without, so to speak, but from within also. He is heart and soul with him. And in rough outline their lives and characters are largely identical though played on a very different stage.

Henry V. as drawn by the historians and by Shakespeare himself, was a character that would naturally have great attractions for Shakespeare. He was a bold, practical, brilliant, and versatile man ; so was Shakespeare.

He was successful in all he undertook, of a happy and buoyant disposition, full of practical good sense, ready alike for peace or war. He had, moreover, a way with him, a way of attracting others to himself, and winning their hearts, from the boisterous Falstaff to the Archbishop of Canterbury himself.

As a youth he kicked against authority and restraint, and found the atmosphere of music halls and taverns more congenial to his taste than the intrigues, quarrels, pastimes, and hypocrisy of Court life. Again in all this we see Shakespeare, himself. Shakespeare, like his favourite, was addicted to the taverns and enjoyed their life and company. He must have done so. His knowledge of such very Bohemian people as Falstaff, Mistress Quickly, Pistol, Bardolf, and the rest, could only have been acquired through intimacy and at first hand.

But when responsibility was thrust upon them, they both of them broke away from their previous mode of life, and escaped destruction in time.

The change in Henry V. was startling and complete. Hardly was the breath out of his father's body, and he finds himself seated on the throne, than he drops his boon companions and becomes a thoughtful and prudent king.

Henry very soon showed the world that he could sit a throne as well as he could bestride a horse. And how did he bestride a horse?

"I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,  
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly armed  
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury  
And vaulted with such ease into his seat,  
As if an angel dropped down from the clouds  
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus  
And witch the world with noble horsemanship."

It is a moot point with the critics whether Prince Henry had been playing a part all the time, the more

to startle the world with his excellencies, when he attained office, or whether he was an instance of a sudden conversion.

"The fact has been noticed," says Dowden, "that with respect to Henry's youthful follies, Shakespeare deviated from all authorities known to have been accessible to him."

"An extraordinary conversion was generally thought to have fallen upon the Prince on coming to the crown, insomuch that the old chroniclers could only account for the change by some miracle of grace, or touch of supernatural benediction. Rather than reproduce this incredible popular tradition concerning Henry, Shakespeare preferred to attempt the difficult task of exhibiting the Prince as a sharer in the wild frolic of youth, while at the same time he was holding himself prepared for the splendid entrance upon his manhood, and stood really aloof in his inmost being from the unworthy life of his associates.

"The change which was effected in the Prince, as represented by Shakespeare, was no miraculous conversion, but merely the transition from boyhood to adult years, and from unchartered freedom to the solemn responsibilities of a great ruler. We must not suppose that Henry formed a deliberate plan for concealing the strength and splendour of his character, in order afterwards to flash forth upon men's sight and overwhelm and dazzle them."

But that is certainly what Shakespeare does lead us to suppose, and out of the mouth of Prince Henry himself.

Is Shakespeare, through the mouth of Prince Henry, making an indirect apology for his own early predilections for tavern life? He seems to say, yes! "I did frequent taverns, but I did it for purposes of

observation and to strengthen my art. I was lying low, so to speak, all the time, and assuming a life that I had really no pleasure in that I might shine the more!"

"It is clear and unquestionable," says Dowden, "that King Henry V. is Shakespeare's ideal of the practical heroic character. He is the king who will not fail. The success of Henry V. will be sound throughout and complete."

So far so good, the observation is correct on the whole, and its truth has been borne witness to by all the historians. But King Henry was Fortune's favourite; he was largely indebted to her for the crowning glory of Agincourt, the culminating point in his career. Doubtless, on the fateful day, Henry's cheerfulness, energy, and courage carried all before him, he proved himself an instantaneous and very effective tactician, and to him belong the honours of the battle.

But how about the strategy that led up to it? It was simply fatuous and deplorable. By all the rules of common sense, let alone those of war, he and his whole army should have been annihilated. He was literally caught in a trap, his retreat was cut off, his troops were hungry, weary, and wet through—

"We are not warriors for the working day;  
Our gayness and our gilt are all besmirched  
With rainy marching in the painful field."

The French outnumbered him by five to one, and it was only the king's resourcefulness and decision when the action broke that turned what looked like certain defeat into a most brilliant victory, and made King Henry's name immortal among the warrior kings. The event of the battle hung on the hazard of a die, and if the die had fallen the wrong way, Henry would

have sunk as low as he now stands high in the estimation of historians.

Shakespeare's account of the battle, as is natural in a play, is fragmentary and disconnected. True as ever to the individual rather than the mass, Shakespeare concentrates his attention on, and is chiefly concerned about, his beloved Henry. He describes his thoughts and utterances in great detail, and notices the most trifling incidents in his bearing. He shows how he rose to the occasion and inspired his followers with courage.

“ *K. Hen.* Gloster, 'tis true we are in great danger:  
The greater therefore should our courage be.  
Good morrow, brother Bedford—God Almighty !  
There is some soul of goodness in things evil,  
Would men observingly distil it out ;  
For our bad neighbour makes us early stirrers,  
Which is both healthful and good husbandry :  
Besides they are our outward consciences,  
And preachers to us all ; admonishing,  
That we should dress us fairly for our end,  
Thus may we gather honey from the weed  
And make a moral of the devil himself.”

He makes Henry give vent to a fine, but not, it must be admitted, a peculiarly appropriate soliloquy on the very eve of the battle.

“ *K. Hen.* Indeed, the French may lay twenty French crowns to one, they will beat us ; for they bear them on their shoulders : but it is no English treason to cut French crowns ; and to-morrow the king himself will be a clipper.

[*Exeunt Soldiers.*

Upon the king !—let us our lives, our souls,  
Our debts, our careful wives, our children, and  
Our sins, lay on the king.  
We must bear all.  
O hard condition ! twin-born with greatness,  
Subject to the breath of every fool, whose sense  
No more can feel but his own wringing !  
What infinite heart's ease must kings neglect,  
That private men enjoy !  
And what have kings, that privates have not too,  
Save ceremony, save general ceremony ?  
And what art thou, thou idol ceremony ?

What kind of god art thou, that suffer'st more  
 Of mortal griefs, than do thy worshippers ?  
 What are thy rents ? what are thy comings-in ?  
 O ceremony, show me but thy worth !  
 What is thy soul of adoration ?  
 Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form,  
 Creating awe and fear in other men ?  
 Wherein thou art less happy, being fear'd,  
 Than they in fearing.  
 What drink'st thou oft, instead of homage sweet,  
 But poison'd flattery ? O, be sick, great greatness,  
 And bid thy ceremony give thee cure !  
 Think'st thou the fiery fever will go out  
 With titles blown from adulation ?  
 Will it give place to flexure and low bending ?  
 Canst thou, when thou command'st the beggar's knee,  
 Command the health of it ? No, thou proud dream,  
 That play'st so subtly with a king's repose :  
 I am a king, that find thee ; and I know  
 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,  
 The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,  
 The inter-tissu'd robe of gold and pearl,  
 The farcèd title running 'fore the king,  
 The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp  
 That beats upon the high shore of this world,—  
 No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,  
 Not all these, laid in bed majestical,  
 Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,  
 Who, with a body fill'd, and vacant mind,  
 Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread ;  
 Never sees horrid night, the child of hell ;  
 But, like a lackey, from the rise to set,  
 Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night  
 Sleeps in Elysium ; next day, after dawn,  
 Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse ;  
 And follows so the ever-running year  
 With profitable labour to his grave :  
 And, but for ceremony, such a wretch,  
 Winding up days with toil, and nights with sleep,  
 Had the fore-hand and vantage of a king.  
 The slave, a member of the country's peace,  
 Enjoys it ; but in gross brain little wots,  
 What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace,  
 Whose hours the peasant best advantages."

The battle of Agincourt itself is very finely described by the historian Green.

"He found on crossing the Somme sixty thousand Frenchmen encamped right across his line of march.



Their position flanked on either side by woods, but with a front so narrow that the dense masses were drawn up thirty men deep, was strong for purposes of defence, but ill-suited for attack: and the French leaders, warned by the experience of Cressy and Poitiers, resolved to await the English advance. Henry, on the other hand, had no choice between attack and unconditional surrender. His troops were starving, and the way to Calais lay across the French army. But the King's courage rose with the peril. A knight, it is said, in his train, wished that the thousands of stout warriors lying idle that night in England had been standing in his ranks.

"Henry answered with a burst of scorn, 'I would not have a single man more. If God give us the victory, it will be plain that we owe it to His grace. If not, the fewer we are the less loss for England.'

"Starving and sick as were the handful of men whom he led, they showed the spirit of their leader. As the chill rainy night passed away, his archers bared their arms and breasts to give fair play to 'the crooked stick and grey goose wing,' but for which, as the rhyme ran, 'England were but a fling,' and with a great shout sprang forward to the attack. The sight of their advance roused the fiery pride of the French; the wise resolve of their leaders was forgotten, and the dense mass of men-at-arms plunged heavily through miry ground on the English front. But at the first sign of movement Henry had halted his line, and fixing in the ground the sharp palisades, with which each man was furnished, his archers poured their fatal arrow flights into the hostile ranks. The carnage was terrible, but the desperate charges of the French at last drove the English archers to the neighbouring woods, from which they were still able to pour their shots into the enemy's flanks, while Henry, with the men-at-arms around

him, flung himself on the French line. In the terrible struggle that followed the king bore off the palm for bravery: he was felled once by a blow from a French mace, and the crown on his helmet was crushed by the sword of the Duke of Alençon; but the enemy was at last broken, and the defeat of the main body of the French was followed at once by the rout of their reserve. The triumph was more complete as the odds were even greater than at Cressy. Eleven thousand Frenchmen lay dead on the field, and more than a hundred princes and great lords were among the fallen."

Notwithstanding Shakespeare's huge benevolence and loving-kindness, he could be stern and just. A sort of huge justice overshadows all he writes. The more one reads him the more difficult is it to understand what Dr Johnson means when he says: "He makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is he careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked." Was Shakespeare likely to be halting all along the road of his plays to discriminate between characters and settle individual disputes in the short-sighted and inaccurate scales of human antipathies and fallibility! No! his scales of justice are larger than that! as Professor Dowden remarks:—

"Shakespeare's impartiality towards the persons and motives of his plays is not real aloofness, it rather proceeds from his profound interest in his subject, his determination to do justice to every side of it."

And as for indifference to really vicious characters like Richard III. and Iago, no one chastises them with more merciless severity than he.

He not infrequently deals out his punishment through the mouths of women, and in this Shakespeare shows his discernment, for women when they are fairly roused and at bay, are far more courageous, vindictive, and terrible in speech at any rate, than are men.

Listen to Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI., and to Queen Anne, the wife of the murdered Edward, the son of Henry and Margaret. Their language is severe and terrible, but not one bit too strong, when we remember that Richard had butchered in cold blood the husband and son of one, and the husband of the other.

*"Anne.* Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and trouble us not ;  
For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,  
Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.  
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,  
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.—  
O, gentlemen, see, see ! dead Henry's wounds  
Open their congeal'd mouths and bleed afresh !—  
Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity ;  
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood  
From cold and empty veins, where no blood dwells ;  
Thy deed, inhuman and unnatural,  
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.—  
O God, which this blood mad'st, revenge his death !  
O earth, which this blood drink'st, revenge his death !  
Either, heaven, with lightning strike the murderer dead ;  
Or, earth, gape open wide, and eat him quick,  
As thou dost swallow up this good king's blood,  
Which his hell-govern'd arm hath butcherèd !

*Q. Mar.* And leave out thee ? stay, dog, for thou shalt  
hear me.  
If heaven have any grievous plague in store  
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,  
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,  
And then hurl down their indignation  
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace !  
The worm of conscience still be-gnaw thy soul !  
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st,  
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends !  
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,  
Unless it be while some tormenting dream  
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils !  
Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog !  
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity  
The slave of nature and the son of hell !  
Thou slander of thy mother's heavy womb !  
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins !  
Thou rag of honour ! thou detested—"

Richard III. was one of those monsters that are raised up at intervals for the chastisement of mankind. Shakespeare draws him as the incarnation of hate.

He was a monster of iniquity, but there is something sublime in his character. He is grand after the grandeur of Satan, though by no means such a gentleman as the Lucifer of Milton. Richard deliberately inverts the moral order of things. He says "evil be thou my good"; he meant what he said, and he acted up to it, he was born evil, he lived evil, and he intended to do so, and he died evil when his life was cut short at the Battle of Bosworth field, amid the execration of his fellows.

There was some excuse for him; he was a little piece of deformity, a hunchback, with a crippled arm, a fierce nature, and an iron will. Nature, so he reasoned, had done badly by him, he would do badly by Nature. He said himself that he would never gain the love of man or woman, therefore he would incur their hate, and incur it he did with a vengeance.

"*Glo.* Now is the winter of our discontent  
 Made glorious summer by this sun of York;  
 And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house  
 In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.  
 Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths;  
 Our bruised arms hung up for monuments;  
 Our stern alarums chang'd to merry meetings,  
 Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.  
 Grim-visag'd war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front;  
 And now—instead of mounting barb'd steeds  
 To fright the souls of fearful adversaries—  
 He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber  
 To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.  
 But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,  
 Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;  
 I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty  
 To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;  
 I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,  
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
 Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
 Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
 And that so lamely and unfashionable,  
 That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;—  
 Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,  
 Have no delight to pass away the time,  
 Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,  
 And descant on mine own deformity:

And therefore—since I cannot prove a lover,  
 To entertain these fair well-spoken days—  
 I am determinèd to prove a villain,  
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days.”

And what does Richard himself say on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth? The scene is midnight, his enemies are closing round him, all the souls of those he had hurried untimely from this life, appear before, and rise up in judgment against him. Richard was no coward, he never felt fear, but he was waking from the land of dreams, a sweat bursts from his brow, the hair of his head stands up, and he exclaims:—

“ *K. Rich.* Give me another horse,—bind up my wounds,—  
 Have mercy, Jesu !—Soft ! I did but dream.—  
 O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me !—  
 The lights burn blue.—It is now dead midnight.  
 Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.  
 What do I fear ? myself ? there's none else by :  
 Richard loves Richard ; that is, I am I.  
 Is there a murderer here ? No ;—yes, I am :  
 Then fly. What, from myself ? Great reason why,—  
 Lest I revenge myself upon myself.  
 Alack, I love myself. Wherefore ? for any good  
 That I myself have done unto myself ?  
 O, no ! alas, I rather hate myself  
 For hateful deeds committed by myself !  
 I am a villain : yet I lie, I am not.  
 Fool, of thyself speak well :—fool, do not flatter.  
 My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
 And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
 And every tale condemns me for a villain.  
 Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree ;  
 Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree ;  
 All several sins, all us'd in each degree,  
 Throng to the bar, crying all ' Guilty ! guilty !'  
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me ;  
 And if I die, no soul shall pity me :  
 Nay, wherefore should they,—since that I myself  
 Find in myself no pity to myself ?

“ There is no creature loves me !” That is a fine touch, the despairing cry of a life of hate. After all, somewhere deep down in his nature Richard could have loved !

## CHAPTER VIII

### SHAKESPEARE : HIS HUMOUR

HAVING reviewed in brief outline the life of Shakespeare, his history, and the character of his age, having, so to speak, walked about the man himself, and surveyed the towers of his mind, let us approach his habitation, lift, as it were, the latch, and enter into the very garden of Shakespeare himself.

The works of Shakespeare adapt themselves to many similes, to a great forest, a garden, a mine of gold and precious stones, or to some building of great splendour, with its massive pillars, delicate tracery, and painted windows, and all the artifices of elaborate and permanent masonry.

Perhaps the garden is the most suitable and best simile of them all, a garden with great and spreading trees, with green sward, and flowers of every colour and variety, here wild and there cultivated, with the wind now stormy and now gentle, with the leaves rustling and the birds singing ; in short Nature everywhere, and the sunlight shining over all.

The architectural simile is not so good, for the reason that the works of Shakespeare are not so much one vast and imposing building complete in itself, but rather a collection of structures, differing from each other, and not infrequently disjointed even in themselves, sometimes a mere concatenation of persons



and speeches, but loosely strung together, in which some of the characters might easily be transposed, and others dropped out, without greatly marring the utterances and vitality of the rest.

They partake somewhat of the nature of the cinematograph, and their sequence and cohesion is not invariably preserved. For this reason no writer lends himself more readily to quotation than Shakespeare. Dr Johnson is quite in error when he says :—

“He that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed with the pedant Hierocles, who, when he offered his house for sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.”

This is misleading for the simple reason that Johnson makes use of the wrong simile. Whereas, if you borrow the metaphor from the flower garden, it throws quite a different light on his contention. If some flowers of extraordinary and rare beauty were displayed, they would surely be a temptation to the beholder to go and view the garden for himself.

There is no writer whose text is more independent of its context than that of Shakespeare, or from whose writings specimens may be more readily gathered. Many of his speeches, and much even of his dialogue, is quite as intelligible, telling, and pointed, without any reference to the context at all. Of course they are necessary to the context and the context to them, but they have the additional qualification of being able to stand alone, whereas in the majority of writers the text without the context loses all or half its meaning, and is quite colourless and ineffectual.

There are many and beautiful flowers in this garden of Shakespeare's: the flowers of humour, of wit, of fancy, of passion, of declamation, of soliloquy, and



so forth, all of which will more than repay close attention and study.

Let us turn first of all to the flower, or rather fruit, of humour. What is humour?

It is a sensation that defies definition. "A fool can ask questions; it takes a wise man to answer them." The saying was never truer than when applied to this particular subject. It is soft as oil, slippery as an eel, and as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel.

It has been defined as a vivid perception of the incongruous. But all incongruities do not necessarily incite this particular emotion. It is better described by its results: as a quality that produces laughter, or an inclination to laughter in the individual. If it does not produce laughter, or an inclination to laughter in the individual, then the particular situation, or saying, is not humorous to that individual.

Laughter is really a safety-valve, or outlet, resulting from the meeting of contending emotions. It corresponds in Nature to the electrical discharge that sometimes takes place when two opposing bodies come together. The emotions must have some outlet appropriate to the occasion; tears are not suitable, so laughter ensues. One sometimes wonders whether the lower animals are possessed of this quality of humour; they probably are not, or they would laugh like ourselves.

The quality of humour differs at different times, and among different races. What is humour, or a cause of risibility on one occasion, may be altogether out of place in another. What appears humorous to one man may arouse anger in another. What is amusing in youth, appears childish in old age. It varies in different periods, and in different countries. The humour that appeals respectively to the English-

man, the Frenchman, and the German, is never quite the same. For instance, a Frenchman never really appreciates as an Englishman does the peculiar flavour of the humour of Dickens.

Dickens may be almost said to be the founder of modern English humour. His humour is, as a rule, essentially different to the humour of Shakespeare. Whatever humour there is in this sense in Shakespeare, is almost entirely concentrated in the person of Falstaff and his intimates. The humour of Dickens is softer and more spontaneous than that of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's humour to a modern ear appears somewhat hard and harsh, partaking rather of the nature of horseplay when contrasted with that of Dickens.

But whatever humour is, we all owe it a debt of gratitude. It has possibly done more to avert strife between individuals and war between the nations, and make life pleasant and agreeable than any other quality whatever.

The man without humour in himself is more dangerous than the man without music in himself. The motions of his soul are indeed dark as Erebus, let no such man be trusted.

A man without any sense of humour, however great he may be, and whatever his accomplishments, is really almost a monstrosity. Such men are rare, but they do exist, and when one comes across them, one experiences very much the same sensation as when one runs up against a tree in the dark. One's nervous system receives a shock from which it does not readily recover. A man without humour may be fit for heaven or hell, but he has no place in this world of every day and ordinary humanity.

As Professor Dowden says—

“A man whose visage holds ‘one stern intent’ from

day to day, and whose joy becomes at times almost a supernatural rapture, may descend through the circles of hell to the narrowest and lowest, or he may mount from sphere to sphere of Paradise ; but he will hardly succeed in presenting us with an adequate image of life, as it is on this earth of ours in all its amplitude and variety."

In other words, he will not be human, and Shakespeare never trespasses beyond the human, with the exception of an occasional ghost, and a few fantastical creations such as sprites, witches, and goblins, to carry his aerial messages and to be the servants of his will.

Professor Dowden, in his chapter on the humour of Shakespeare, is not quite so felicitous as he usually is ; he seems somewhat out of his depth, and does not handle the subject altogether satisfactorily. He talks about "the laughter of men of genius," as if the laughter of men of genius, unless hypocritical, could differ very greatly from the laughter of anybody else. And then he goes on and endeavours to create "a history" of the laughter of Shakespeare. It is enough to make Shakespeare turn in his grave. Shakespeare at times made merry, and was glad like other people, and he indulges in laughter all along the line, as the necessities of his art and his own inclination dictate : and that is all that can be said about it—there is no "history" whatever in the matter.

Of course there is the forced or affected laugh, adopted by some as a cover for their deficiencies, and to conceal the vacuity of their minds. It is really a confession of being unequal to the occasion, and is no true laugh at all. But some men use it habitually for the same reason that they adjust and readjust a monacle, or light and relight a cigarette.

But if there is no great amount of humour in Shakespeare, there is at any rate an abundance of wit, diffused through the majority of his works, cropping up in this person and in that, as the necessities of the situation require.

But there is a broad distinction between humour and wit. In Shakespeare's wit there is always wisdom, and this wisdom pulls one up as it were, and bids one reflect, and is a check on the spontaneous outburst of laughter.

Humour is less intellectual, and more sympathetic than wit. Humour relies more on the situation, and wit more on the word. With wit, banter, and merri-ment Shakespeare's works are replete.

The word "humour" is, of course, used in many senses. It is generally used as a state of mind, mood, or inclination, and Shakespeare himself nearly always uses the word in that sense:—

"He hath wronged me in some humours."

"I should have borne the humoured letter to her."

"Have not the humour of bread and cheese; and there is the humour."

But when one talks of the humour of Shakespeare, one means that quality in his writings which induces risibility or laughter, and depends not merely on words, but on the juxtaposition of situations and a variety of incongruities.

Let us turn to the greatest of all Shakespeare's humorous creations, the great Sir John Falstaff himself. And here it may be necessary to remind the reader that *the* Sir John Falstaff is the Falstaff that appears in *Henry IV.*, and not the Falstaff of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, a very different and inferior creation. In the former play, if a rather disgusting, he is, in his way, at any rate, a very great

and original personality. In the latter, a sort of whipping-boy, a pivot round which the play is made to revolve, a big-bellied impostor, or at the best, Falstaff in his dotage. But the real Falstaff, the Jack Falstaff to his intimates, the John Falstaff to his relations, and the Sir John to all Europe, is, if not a refined, at any rate an exhilarating and stupendous creation.

Let us consider for a moment this very great impersonation.

Falstaff is a wonderful composition, and could only have been kneaded into the master spirit that we find him by the hand of Shakespeare himself.

Shakespeare means to represent in Falstaff something more than an amusing rascal, whoremaster, and sot, though as he appears to the world and reveals himself at the "Boar's Head," these are the leading and outstanding features of the man, redeemed to some extent, by his stupendous vitality, and his inexhaustible and irrepressible wit.

But when we take into account not only what the man actually was, but what he might have been, had he directed aright the great underlying qualities and gifts that were hidden, but inherent, in his nature, the mystery is partly explained. Falstaff stands for a type of the mighty degenerate.

Here we find a man, by birth a gentleman, by profession a soldier, and by his intellectual and other gifts a born leader of men, nothing greater than the leader of a tavern bar, with a cup of sack always at his mouth, with a Doll Tearsheet on his knee, and a Mistress Quickly in his arms whenever that somewhat bustling and practical person was willing to submit to his embraces. A bully by habit rather than inclination, whenever he could bully with impunity, with

a wit that over-matched such a master of repartee as Prince Hal himself, whom Shakespeare uses as a sort of tap to make Falstaff's wit to flow, and at the same time as a foil, to ward off and throw back on Falstaff himself, the overflow and excess of his humour: a man, who by sheer bounce, bluff, and audacity escaped, in nine cases out of ten, from the difficult, and at times dangerous, situations in which he found himself, which he himself had brought about, and which would have laid by the heels, or strung up by the neck a meaner man. In short, Falstaff was at once a great personality and a type, and Shakespeare intended him to be so. Many shortcomings and transgressions are excused and overlooked in strong and entertaining characters, which in men of lesser nature would find no forgiveness or excuse.

The type is common, one recognises it at once, and Falstaff is its king.

But whatever Falstaff was, his humour is undisputed and supreme; he was not only witty himself, but, as he himself says, the cause of wit in other men.

Even in a play it was impossible for Falstaff to spend his *whole* time drinking at the "Boar's Head," and Shakespeare had to find for him some other distraction.

It must be remembered that Falstaff held the king's commission, but whatever soldier-like qualities he was possessed of were exercised except under compulsion, not in fighting the king's enemies, but in relieving His Majesty's peaceful subjects of their purses.

He was always hard up for cash:—

"I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse; borrowing only lingers and lingers it out, but the disease is incurable."

It was this that necessitated the little affair at Gadshill, related with such infinite gusto and wit.



Falstaff's predatory nature reveals itself at his first appearance in the play.

"Enter Prince HENRY and FALSTAFF.

*Fal.* Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

*P. Hen.* Thou art so fat-witted, with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta,—I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day.

*Fal.* Indeed, you come near me now, Hal; for we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars, and not by Phoebus,—he, 'that wandering knight so fair.' And, I prithee, sweet wag, when thou art king,—as, God save thy grace,—majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt have none,—

*P. Hen.* What, none?

*Fal.* No, by my troth,—not so much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter.

*P. Hen.* Well, how then? come, roundly, roundly.

*Fal.* Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal.

*P. Hen.* Thou sayest well, and it holds well too; for the fortune of us that are the moon's men doth ebb and flow like the sea, being governed, as the sea is, by the moon. As, for proof, now: a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on Monday night, and most dissolutely spent on Tuesday morning; got with swearing 'lay by,' and spent with crying 'bring in,' now in as low an ebb as the foot of the ladder, and by and bye in as high a flow as the ridge of the gallows.

*Fal.* By the Lord, thou sayest true, lad. And is not mine hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?"

Following on this conversation, the robbery of Gadshill was planned. Prince Hal pretended to fall in with it, and consents to make one of the party. But he and his servant Poins, secretly agreed to allow Falstaff and his minion to do their work, and then to secure the booty for themselves by attacking



Falstaff in disguise. This they did with complete success, and relieved Falstaff of his ill-gotten gains. Falstaff succumbed at once, and ran for all he was worth, and at the re-union of all parties at the "Boar's Head" in the evening, Falstaff's much vaunted bravery is played upon, drawn out, and exposed by Prince Hal and the rest, to Falstaff's complete discomfiture, or what would have been the discomfiture of another man:—

"*Poin.* Welcome, Jack! Where hast thou been?"

*Fal.* A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance too! marry and amen!—Give me a cup of sack, boy. Ere I lead this life long, I'll sew nether stocks, and mend them and foot them too. A plague of all cowards!—Give me a cup of sack, rogue.—Is there no virtue extant? [*Drinks.*]

*P. Hen.* Didst thou never see Titan kiss a dish of butter? pitiful-hearted butter, that melted at the sweet tale of the sun! if thou didst, then behold that compound.

*Fal.* You rogue, here's lime in this sack too: there is nothing but roguery to be found in villanous man: yet a coward is worse than a cup of sack with lime in it,—a villanous coward.—Go thy ways, old Jack; die when thou wilt, if manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then am I a shotten herring. There live not three good men unhang'd in England; and one of them is fat, and grows old: God help the while! a bad world, I say. I would I were a weaver; I could sing psalms or any thing. A plague of all cowards! I say still.

*P. Hen.* How now, wool-sack! what mutter you?

*Fal.* A king's son! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild-geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more. You Prince of Wales!

*P. Hen.* Why, you whoreson round man, what's the matter?

*Fal.* Are you not a coward? answer me to that:—and Poin's there?

*Poin.* Zounds, ye fat paunch, an ye call me coward, by the Lord, I'll stab thee.

*Fal.* I call thee coward! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward: but I would give a thousand pound, I could run as fast as thou canst. You are straight enough in the shoulders,—you care not who sees your back: call you that backing of your friends? A plague upon such backing! give me them that will face me.—Give me a cup of sack:—I am a rogue, if I drunk to-day.

*P. Hen.* O villain ! thy lips are scarce wiped since thou drunkenest last.

*P. Hen.* What's the matter ?

*Fal.* What's the matter ! there be four of us here have ta'en a thousand pound this day morning.

*P. Hen.* Where is it, Jack ? where is it ?

*Fal.* Where is it ! taken from us it is : a hundred upon poor four of us.

*P. Hen.* What, a hundred, man ?

*Fal.* I am a rogue, if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have scaped by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose ; my buckler cut through and through ; my sword hacked like a hand-saw,—*ecce signum* ! I never dealt better since I was a man : all would not do. A plague of all cowards ! —Let them speak : if they speak more or less than truth, they are villains and the sons of darkness.

*Fal.* But, as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green came at my back and let drive at me ;—for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand.

*P. Hen.* These lies are like the father that begets them,—gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou nott-pated fool.

*Fal.* What, art thou mad ? art thou mad ? is not the truth the truth ?

*P. Hen.* Why, how couldst thou know these men in Kendal green, when it was so dark that couldst not see thy hand ? come, tell us your reason : what sayest thou to this ?

*Poin.* Come, your reason, Jack,—your reason.

*Fal.* What, upon compulsion ? No ; were I at the strappado, or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you on compulsion. Give you a reason on compulsion ! if reasons were as plenty as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion, I.

*P. Hen.* I'll be no longer guilty of this sin ; this sanguine coward, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh,—

*P. Hen.* Well, breathe awhile, and then to it again : and when thou hast tired thyself in base comparisons, hear me speak but this.

*Poin.* Mark, Jack.

*P. Hen.* We two saw you four set on four ; you bound them, and were masters of their wealth.—Mark now, how a plain tale shall put you down.—Then did we two set on you four ; and, with a word, outfaced you from your prize, and have it ; yea, and can show it you here in the house :—and, Falstaff, you carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still ran and

roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. What a slave art thou, to hack thy sword as thou hast done, and then say it was in fight! What trick, what device, what starting-hole, canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

*Poin.* Come, let's hear, Jack; what trick hast thou now?

*Fal.* By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear ye, my masters: was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? should I turn upon the true prince? why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. But, by the Lord, lads, I am glad you have the money.—Hostess, clap-to the doors [*to Hostess within*]:—watch to-night, pray to-morrow."

In the midst of this dialogue a messenger appears from the king, summoning Prince Hal to his presence on the following morning.

Falstaff suggests that they should have a rehearsal of the scene that was likely to take place on the following morning between the prince and his father. Falstaff will play the king and act as coach. Prince Hal in his turn plays the king and acts as reprover of Falstaff:—

"*Fal.* Well, thou wilt be horribly chid to-morrow when thou comest to thy father: if thou love me, practise an answer.

*P. Hen.* Do thou stand for my father, and examine me upon the particulars of my life.

*Fal.* Shall I? content:—this chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown.

*P. Hen.* Thy state is taken for a joint-stool, thy golden sceptre for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown!

*Fal.* Well, an the fire of grace be not quite out of thee, now shalt thou be moved.—Give me a cup of sack to make mine eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept; for I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyzes' vein. [*Drinks.*]

*P. Hen.* Well, here is my leg.

*Fal.* And here is my speech.—Stand aside, nobility.

*Host.* O Jesu, this is excellent sport, i' faith!

*Fal.* Weep not, sweet queen; for trickling tears are vain.

*Host.* O, the father, how he holds his countenance!

. . . . .

*Fal.* Peace, good pint-pot; peace, good tickle-brain.—Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied: for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion; but chiefly a villanous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me. If, then, thou be son to me, here lies the point;—why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher, and eat blackberries? a question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses? a question to be asked. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest: for, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also:—and yet there is a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

*P. Hen.* What manner of man, an it like your majesty?

*Fal.* A goodly portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r lady, inclining to three-score; and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff: if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If, then, the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff: him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me where hast thou been this month?

*P. Hen.* Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me and I will play thy father.

*Fal.* Depose me, if thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and in matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poulter's hare.

*P. Hen.* Well, here I am set.

*Fal.* And here I stand,—judge my masters.

*P. Hen.* Now, Harry, whence come you?

*Fal.* My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

*P. Hen.* The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

*Fal.* My lord, they are false.

*P. Hen.* Swearest thou, ungracious boy? Henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art visibly carried away from grace: there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man—a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that huge bombard of sack, that reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father ruffian, that Vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? Wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? Wherein cunning but in craft? Wherein crafty

but in villainy? Wherein villainous, but in all things? Wherein worthy, but in nothing?

*Fal.* I would your grace would take me with you: who means your grace?

*P. Hen.* That villainous, abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

*Fal.* My lord, the man I know.

*P. Hen.* I know thou dost.

*Fal.* But to say I know more harm in him than in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old (the more the pity) his white hairs do witness it; but that he is (saving your reverence) a whoremaster, that I entirely deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned: if to be fat is to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but, for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish him not thy Henry's company!—banish plump Jack, and banish all the world."

Falstaff was occasionally dragged off to the wars in real earnest, to his great annoyance and discomfiture. He was a ton of flesh, heavy, sweated prodigiously, and

"larded the lean earth as he went along."

He invariably appeared late on the field of battle, with the most ragged rascals for a regiment:—

"*P. Hal.* I did never see such pitiful rascals.

*Fal.* Tut! tut! good enough to toss, food for powder; they will fill a pit as well as better, tush man!—mortal men, mortal men."

In the wars, though mindful of his person, Falstaff was not unmindful of his purse.

He was compelled to raise a regiment, and had the king's authority for "pricking" pretty well whom he would, and a method of raising money out of the operation at once suggested itself to his ingenuity:—

"*Fal.* If I be not ashamed of my soldiers, I am a soused garnet. I have misused the king's press damnably. I have got in exchange of a hundred and fifty soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds. I press me none but good householders, yeomen's sons; enquire me out contracted bachelors, such as had been asked twice on the bans; such a commodity of warm slaves, as had as lief hear the devil as a drum."



In other words he "pricked" those that he knew would buy themselves out, and pocketed the money. He then replaced them by all the scarecrows in the county :—

"I will not march through Coventry with them that's flat.  
There is not a shirt and a half in all my company."

Falstaff came up late for the battle of Shrewsbury, and meets Prince Henry on the field.

This battle was the occasion of one of the most humorous incidents in Falstaff's career; Falstaff turns the tables on Prince Hal for his treatment of him at Gadshill.

Falstaff had no relish for fighting; and, if he had, sack had quite incapacitated his efficiency. So he pretended to be dead when the prince sees him on the ground :—

"*P. Hal.* What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh  
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!  
I could have better spar'd a better man:  
O, I should have a heavy miss of thee,  
If I were much in love with vanity!  
Death hath not struck so fat a deer to-day,  
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.  
Embowell'd will I see thee by and by:  
Till then in blood by noble Percy lie.

[*Exit.*

*Fal. [rising]* Embowelled! if thou embowel me to-day, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me too to-morrow. 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit: to die, is to be a counterfeit; for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valour is discretion; in the which better part I have saved my life. Zounds, I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead: how, if he should counterfeit too, and rise? by my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. Therefore I'll make him sure; yea, and I'll swear I killed him. Why may not he rise as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me. Therefore, sirrah [*stabbing him*], with a new wound in your thigh, come you along with me.

*P. Hen.* Come, brother John, full bravely hast thou flushed thy maiden sword.

*P. John.* But, soft, whom have we here ?  
Did you not tell me this fat man was dead ?

*P. Hen.* I did ; I saw him dead, breathless, and bleeding  
On the ground.

Art thou alive ? or is it phantasy  
That plays upon our eyesight. I prythee,  
We will not trust our eyes without our ears :  
Thou art not what thou seem'st.

*Fal.* No, that's certain ; I am not a double man ; but if I  
be not Jack Falstaff, then am I a Jack. There is Percy.  
[*throwing the body down*] : if your father will do me any honour,  
so ; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be  
either earl or duke, I can assure you.

*P. Hen.* Why, Percy I killed myself, and saw thee dead.

*Fal.* Didst thou ? Lord, lord, how this world is given to  
lying ! I grant you I was down, and out of breath, and so  
was he ; but we rose both at an instant, and fought a long  
hour by Shrewsbury clock."

Falstaff makes a request of the prince—

" Hal, if thou see me down in the battle, and bestride me,  
so ; 'tis a point of friendship.

*P. Hen.* Nothing but a Colossus can do thee that friendship.  
Say thy prayers, and farewell.

*Fal.* I would it were bed-time, Hal, and all well.

*P. Hen.* Why, thou owest God a death.

*Fal.* 'Tis not due yet ; I would be loth to pay him before  
his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not  
on me ? Well, 'tis no matter ; honour pricks me on. Yea,  
but how if honour prick me off when I come on ? how then ?  
Can honour set to a leg ? no : or an arm ? no : or take away  
the grief of a wound ? no. Honour hath no skill in surgery,  
then ? no. What is honour ? a word. What is that word,  
honour ? air. A trim reckoning !—Who hath it ? he that  
died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it ? no. Doth he hear it ?  
no. Is it insensible, then ? yea, to the dead. But will it not  
live with the living ? no. Why ? detraction will not suffer  
it. Therefore I'll none of it : honour is a mere scutcheon :—  
and so ends my catechism."

Falstaff is always equal to the occasion, and a match  
for any one that contradicted him, or called his conduct  
in question. He had an answer even for the staid Lord  
Chief Justice himself:—

" *Ch. Just.* Sir John, Sir John, I am well acquainted with  
your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way. It  
is not a confident brow, nor the throng of words that come  
with such more than impudent sauciness from you, can thrust  
me from a level consideration : you have, as it appears to me,



practised upon the easy-yielding spirit of this woman, and made her serve your uses both in purse and in person.

*Host.* Yea, in truth, my lord.

*Ch. Just.* Prithee, peace.—Pay her the debt you owe her, and unpay the villany you have done her: the one you may do with sterling money, and the other with current repentance.

*Fal.* My lord, I will not undergo this sneap without reply. You call honourable boldness impudent sauciness; if a man will make court'sy, and say nothing, he is virtuous:—no, my lord, my humble duty remembered, I will not be your suitor. I say to you, I do desire deliverance from these officers, being upon hasty employment in the king's affairs."

With the death of Henry IV. and the accession to the throne of Prince Hal, as Henry V., the career of Falstaff comes to an end. His presence is no longer required. He was staying in the country with a Mr Justice Shallow at the time of the king's unexpected decease, and on receipt of the news hurried post haste to London, to acclaim the new king, and extract, if possible, from his royal patron all the favours that he thought were his due. But all he met with was a rebuke and dismissal.

Prince Henry is no longer Prince Hal, but was now His Majesty King Henry V., and realised that his new dignity and the expectations of his people required of him that he should mend his ways and rid himself of his former companion.

Sir John is in the crowd, and greets the king as he passes:—

"*Fal.* God save thy grace King Hal! my royal Hal!

*King.* I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers, How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!

I have long dreamed of such a kind of man,

So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane;

But being awake, I do despise my dream

Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace;

Leave gourmanding; know the grave doth gape

For thee thrice wider than for other men."

And with this sermon from the king, Falstaff passes from the scene. We leave the old tun of flesh with

regret. If his sins were many, the audience at any rate will condone them for the laughter and merriment he has imparted to their lives.

We hear of him once more in *King Henry V.*, when Mistress Quickly recounts his death-bed scene in a never-to-be-forgotten and very pathetic speech:—

"*Pist.* No ; for my manly heart doth yearn.—  
Bardolph, be blithe ;—Nym, rouse thy vaunting veins ;—  
Boy, bristle thy courage up ;—for Falstaff he is dead,  
And we must yearn therefore.

*Bard.* Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell !

*Host.* Nay, sure, he's not in hell : he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a fine end, and went away, an it had been any christom child ; 'a parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide : for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way ; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. 'How, now, Sir John !' quoth I : 'what, man ! be o' good cheer.' So 'a cried out 'God, God, God !' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God ; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet : I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone ; then I felt to his knees, and so upward and upward, and all was as cold as any stone.

*Nym.* They say he cried out for sack.

*Host.* Ay, that 'a did.

*Bard.* And of women.

*Host.* Nay, that 'a did not.

*Boy.* Yes, 'a did ; and said they were devils incarnate.

*Host.* 'A could never abide carnation ; 'twas a colour he never liked.

*Boy.* 'A said once, the devil would have him about women.

*Host.* 'A did in some sort indeed handle women ; but then he was rheumatic and talked of the whore of Babylon."

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* there is plenty of humour, but the laughter is caused as much by the situation, by what is done, as by what is said.

Falstaff here is simply made a fool of, in a way that the Falstaff of *Henry IV.* would never have submitted to or tolerated.

He confesses as much :—

“ I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass.”

“ *Fal.* Well, I am your theme, you have the start of me : I am dejected, use me as you will.”

Imagine the real Falstaff making such an admission as that.

Perhaps the funniest character in the play is the Frenchman, Dr Caius. Shakespeare hits off to a nicety the accent and little peculiarities of a naturalised Frenchman. His courtship of sweet Anne Page, and the duel, that was only just avoided on her account, with the Welsh parson Sir Hugh Evans, is as amusing as anything in the play. The excitement of the fiery little French doctor reaches its climax when he discovers that by the trickery of a parcel of women he finds himself mated with a boy, and not with sweet Anne Page at all:—

“ *Caius.* Vere is mistress Page ? By gar, I am cozened : I ha’ married *un garçon*, a boy : *un paison*, by gar, a boy ; it is not Anne Page, by gar, I am cozened.

*Mis. Page.* Why did you take her in green ?

*Caius.* Ay, by gar, and ’tis a boy : by gar, I’ll raise all Windsor.

*Ford.* This is strange. Who hath got the right Anne ? ”

The play, when cleverly acted, is a screaming farce, and rumour has it that it was written to order.

It is the only play of Shakespeare’s written wholly in prose.

Dennis and Rowe both assert that it was written by order of Elizabeth.

“ *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,” says Dowden, “is a play written expressly for the barbarian aristocrats with their hatred of ideas, their insensibility to beauty, their hard, efficient manners, and their demand for impropriety.

“The good folk of London liked to see a prince or

a duke, and they liked to see him made gracious and generous. These royal and noble persons at Windsor wished to see the interior life of country gentlemen of the middle-class, with their excellent *bourgeois* morals, and rough, jocose ways.

"The comedy of hearing a French physician and a Welsh parson speak broken English was appreciated by these spectators, who uttered their mother tongue with exemplary accent. Shakespeare did not make a grievance of his task. He threw himself into it with spirit, and despatched his work quickly — in fourteen days, if we accept the tradition.

This last play and *The Comedy of Errors* are the only two strictly comic pieces, or comedies, that Shakespeare ventured upon.

*The Comedy of Errors*, usually said to be an adaptation from the *Menæchmi* of the Latin comic poet Plautus, has a tragic background, and is complicated by the introduction of a double set of twins. The humorous situations, if humorous they can be called, arise from mistaken identity, and the double shuffling of these two pairs. The play was one of Shakespeare's earliest, and certainly not one of his happiest efforts.

It is somewhat laborious, sprawling, and ineffective, and does not carry one easily along, as Shakespeare with his light in hand dexterity usually does.

The voice is Shakespeare's voice, but the hands of manipulation might belong to another.

Comedy is not really Shakespeare's forte, and he early discovered and discarded it. Dr Johnson asserts that it was, but Johnson was obviously mistaken.

The two comedies referred to do not in their sphere attain the height of excellence that a *Henry V.* in the histories, an *As You Like It* in the fantasies, or a *Macbeth* in the tragedies, do in theirs.

The garment of comedy does not become Shakespeare so well or sit so gracefully upon him. He was evidently aware of it ; or why did he abandon it so early !

For other humorous characters we have Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, a very pompous and ignorant subordinate official, with a vast idea of his own importance and abilities :—

“ *Dogberry*. I am a wise fellow, and which is more, an Officer, and which is more, a householder ; and which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to, and a rich fellow enough, go to, and a fellow that hath had losses, and that hath two good gowns, and everything handsome about him.”

He is not humorous in himself, but his ignorance and stupidity excite laughter in others.

His humour, is of that particular brand that consists in using—like Mrs Ramsbotham—the wrong word :—

“ *Dogberry*. Oh villain, thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this.”

“ Is our whole dissembly appeared.”

And so forth.

His instructions to the Watch are about the limit of his official knowledge :—

“ This is your charge ; you shall comprehend all vagrom men ; you are to bid any man stand in the prince’s name.

*Watch*. How if he will not stand ?

*Dogberry*. Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go, and presently call the rest of the Watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.”

Petruchio, in the *Taming of the Shrew*, is sometimes cited as one of Shakespeare’s humorous characters. No doubt he adopts the right method in bringing to reason and subjection an ill-tempered and shrewish woman. But the humour of Petruchio is hardly the humour of to-day, and chiefly consists of rather rough horse-play, and flat contradiction. He overpowers contradiction by stronger contradiction still.

In *The Twelfth Night*—both in language and sentiment a very beautiful play—we have the great Sir Toby Belch, a fine gentleman, and brave man enough, but for the rest a barbarian. His humour is forcible, but coarse, and at times obscene. The really humorous character in the play is Maria, lady's maid to Olivia. It is she who plots and arranges the discomfiture of the conceited Malvolio, with all a woman's dexterous malignity and delight in wounding a nature hostile to her own.

For the rest, clowns abound in Shakespeare's works, some humorous, some witty, some a mixture of the two. There wit is, of course, frequently forced, and prepared beforehand, but that is as it should be.

Clowns are professionals, and wit is their stock-in-trade, which they replenish and increase as they proceed.

## CHAPTER IX

### SHAKESPEARE: WIT AND SATIRE

HAVING discussed Shakespeare's humour in the last chapter, let us turn for a moment to its twin brother, wit.

The two are akin, though not identical, as has already been pointed out. Humour is usually good-natured and void of malice; "wit," not always so—one can be witty, as the saying is, at other people's expense.

Shakespeare's wit is at once crisp and brilliant, and generally arises from the play of two opposing intellects. It is the swordplay of the mind, and he loves it:—

"Now by the salt wave of the Mediterranean, a sweet touch, a quick venue of wit, snip, snap, quick and home; it rejoiceth my intellect, true wit."

All Shakespeare's lighter plays, or "fantasies" as one must call them for want of a better appellation, are spangled over, and sparkle with this quality of wit, just as the purple of the heavens on a clear, deep night is spangled over and lit up with innumerable stars; and as some quarters of the heavens are more densely populated with these luminaries than are others, so some plays of Shakespeare's shine more brilliantly than the rest, by the light of this particular intellectual illumination.

This quality of wit abounds everywhere, in all Shakespeare's lighter creations. But as space forbids,



and patience has its limitations, it is necessary for the writer to be frugal in its distribution; and if the reader be greedy for more, let him betake himself to the fountain head, viz., Shakespeare himself.

So here let us confine ourselves to some of those stars of wit that discover themselves in the particular, and very brilliant constellations of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *As You Like It*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. A beautiful and enchanting galaxy they are, shining with the reflected glory of the great sun of Shakespeare's intelligence.

The two characters in *Much Ado About Nothing* that shine, stand out in bold relief, and cast almost into the shade other very striking personalities, are unquestionably Benedick and Beatrice; they rivet the attention and hold the mind almost to the exclusion of the noble Claudio and the much-wronged Hero, whom Shakespeare probably intended to be *the* figures of the piece. It is an instance of two subordinate characters usurping unintentionally, by their inherent power and native quality, the throne that was intended for others.

Benedick is a brilliant, courtly, and much-travelled bachelor, confident of his powers, disdainful of women, and a flirt, but with the flirtation of the head rather than the heart: a man who would shine and be attractive to the opposite sex, in any company he might find himself; yet withal of a good heart and a kindly nature.

The following is the character given him by the Prince Don Pedro, who had certainly no object in singing his praises, as he was inclined to a little flirtation with Beatrice on his own account:—

“ *D. Pedro.* She doth well: if she should make tender of her love, 'tis very possible he'll scorn it; for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.

*Claud.* He is a very proper man.

*D. Pedro.* He hath indeed a good outward happiness.

*Claud.* 'Fore God, and in my mind, very wise.

*D. Pedro.* He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.

*Leon.* And I take him to be valiant.

*D. Pedro.* As Hector, I assure you : and in the managing of quarrels you may say he is wise ; for either he avoids them with great discretion, or undertakes them with a most Christian-like fear.

*Leon.* If he do fear God, he must necessarily keep the peace : if he break the peace, he ought to enter into a quarrel with fear and trembling.

*D. Pedro.* And so will he do ; for the man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests he will make. Well, I am sorry for your niece. Shall we go seek Benedick, and tell him of her love ? ”

Benedick was the confessed and sworn bachelor ; love and marriage were not for him :—

“ *Bene.* I know that ; but I would have thee hence, and here again. [*Exit Boy.*—I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love : and such a man is Claudio. I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife ; and now had he rather hear the tabor and the pipe : I have known when he would have walked ten mile a-foot to see a good armour ; and now will he lie ten nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet. He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier ; and now he is turned orthographer ; his words are a very fantastical banquet,—just so many strange dishes. May I be so converted, and see with these eyes ? I cannot tell ; I think not : I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster ; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair,—yet I am well ; another is wise,—yet I am well ; another virtuous,—yet I am well : but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain ; wise, or I'll none ; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her ; fair, or I'll never look on her ; mild, or come not near me ; noble, or not I for an angel ; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what colour it please God.—Ha, the price and Monsieur Love ! I will hide me in the arbour.

[*Withdraws into the arbour.*

*Bene.* That a woman conceived me, I thank her ; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks : but

that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is (for the which I may go the finer), I will live a bachelor."

Beatrice herself, though not committed to perpetual virginity, was fanciful and exacting, and would wed the man of her choice, or go unwed altogether.

" *Enter* LEONATO, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others.

*Leon.* Was not Count John here at supper?

*Ant.* I saw him not.

*Beat.* How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burned an hour after.

*Hero.* He is of a very melancholy disposition.

*Beat.* He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick: the one is too like an image, and says nothing; and the other too like my lady's eldest son, evermore tattling.

*Leon.* Then half Signior Benedick's tongue in Count John's mouth, and half Count John's melancholy in Signior Benedick's face,——

*Beat.* With a good leg and a good foot, uncle, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world,—if he could get her good-will.

*Leon.* By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

*Ant.* In faith, she's too curst.

*Beat.* Too curst is more than curst: I shall lessen God's sending that way; for it is said, 'God sends a curst cow short horns;' but to a cow too curst he sends none.

*Leon.* So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.

*Beat.* Just, if he send me no husband; for the which blessing I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face: I had rather lie in the woollen.

*Leon.* You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

*Beat.* What should I do with him? dress him in my apparel, and make him my waiting-gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth; and he that hath no beard is less than a man: and he that is more than a youth is not for me; and he that is less than a man, I am not for him: therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the bearward, and lead his apes into hell.

*Leon.* Well, then, go you into hell?

*Beat.* No; but to the gate; and there will the devil meet me, like an old cuckold, with horns on his head, and say, 'Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven; here's no place for you maids:' so deliver I up my apes, and away to

Saint Peter : for the heavens, he shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long.

*Ant.* Well, niece [*to Hero*], I trust you will be ruled by your father.

*Beat.* Yes, faith ; it is my cousin's duty to make courtesy, and say, ' Father, as it please you : '—but yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another courtesy, and say, ' Father, as it please me.'

*Leon.* Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

*Beat.* Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust ? to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl ? No, uncle, I'll none : Adam's sons are my brethren ; and, truly, I hold it a sin to match in my kindred.

*Leon.* Daughter, remember what I told you : if the prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

*Beat.* The fault will be in the music, cousin, if you be not woo'd in good time, if the prince be too important, tell him, there is measure in everything, and so dance out the answer ; for hear me, Hero, wooing, wedding, and repenting, is a Scotch jig, a measure, and cinque-pace ; the first suit is hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical ; the wedding, mannerly, modest, as a measure, full of state and ancestry ; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.

*Leon.* Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

*Beat.* I have a good eye, uncle : I can see a Church by daylight."

Let her cousin, Hero, her most intimate friend, and therefore more qualified to speak than another, portray her character :—

" *Hero.* O God of love ! I know he doth deserve  
As much as may be yielded to a man.  
But Nature never framed a woman's heart  
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice ;  
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,  
Misprising what they look on ; and her wit  
Values itself so highly, that to her  
All matter else seems weak ; she cannot love,  
Nor take no shape nor project of affection ;  
She is so self-endear'd."

The fun begins when Beatrice appears upon the scene ; the scintillating brightness of her wit declares itself almost immediately. She is witty all through,

and mistress of a very smart and happy repartee ; the very girl to subdue Benedick with his own weapons :—

“ *Leon.* Faith, niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much : but he will be meet with you I doubt not.

*Mess.* He hath done good service, lady, in these wars. And a good soldier to a lady.

*Beat.* A good soldier to a lady ;—but what is he to a lord ?

*Mess.* A lord to a lord, a man to a man ; stuffed with all honourable virtues.

*Beat.* It is so indeed, he is no less than a stuffed man ; but for the stuffing, well, we are all mortal.

*Leon.* You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her : they never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them.

*Beat.* Alas, he gets nothing by that ! In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one : so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse ; for it is all the wealth that he hath left, to be known a reasonable creature.—Who is his companion now ? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

*Mess.* Is’t possible ?

*Beat.* Very easily possible : he wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat ; it ever changes with the next block.

*Mess.* I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

*Beat.* No ; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray you, who is his companion ? Is there no young squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil ?

*Mess.* He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

*Beat.* O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease : he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio ! if he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

*Mess.* I will hold friends with you, lady.

*Beat.* Do, good friend.

*Leon.* You will never run mad, niece.

*Beat.* No, not till a hot January.

*Mess.* Don Pedro is approached.

*Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and BALTHAZAR.*

*D. Pedro.* Good Signior Leonato, you are come to meet your trouble : the fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

*Leon.* Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace : for trouble being gone, comfort should remain ; but when you depart from me sorrow abides, and happiness takes his leave.

*D. Pedro.* You embrace your charge too willingly.—I think this is your daughter ?

*Leon.* Her mother hath many times told me so.

*Bene.* Were you in doubt, sir, that you ask her ?

*Leon.* Signior Benedick, no ; for then were you a child.

*D. Pedro.* You have it full, Benedick : we may guess by this what you are, being a man.—Truly the lady fathers herself.—Be happy, lady ; for you are like an honourable father.

*Bene.* If Signior Leonato be her father she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.

*Beat.* I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick : nobody marks you.

*Bene.* What, my dear Lady Disdain ! are you yet living ?

*Beat.* Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick ? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

*Bene.* Then is courtesy a turncoat.—But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted : and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart ; for truly, I love none.

*Beat.* A dear happiness to women : they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood I am of your humour for that ; I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

*Bene.* God keep your ladyship still in that mind ! so some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratched face.

*Beat.* Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were.

*Bene.* Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

*Beat.* A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours."

Neither Beatrice nor Benedick are willing to succumb or to confess themselves beaten in this half-amorous half-intellectual encounter. The merry war is kept up all along the line, until the end of the play, with a delightful raillery, and yet with a sort of hidden rapture in the heart of each. That they were predisposed to one another from the first is manifest ; but neither of them was willing to give way, until the play of mind with which they were both so richly endowed had played itself out, and their hearts were left hungry and naked to the assault of love.

The opportunity for this assault was brought about by the strategy of others. The friends of each, by a



very clever device, bring home to both that they were dying of love the one for the other. Benedick begins to unbend and reconsider his position as a bachelor:—

“ *Bene.* This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me! why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry:—I must not seem proud:—happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair,—’tis a truth, I can bear them witness; and virtuous,—’tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me,—by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? a man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences, and these paper-bullets of the brain, awe a man from the career of his humour? no; the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.—Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she’s a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.”

Beatrice is moved by what she hears, and also resolves to give way:—

“ *Beat.* What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?  
Stand I condemned for pride, and scorn so much?  
Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!  
No glory lives behind the back of such,  
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,  
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand:  
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee  
To bind our loves up in a holy band;  
For others say, thou dost deserve, and I  
Believe it better than reportingly.”

They both confess their love for each other almost at the conclusion of the play, and following on the painful scene in the Church, between Claudio and Hero:—

“ *Bene.* Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?  
*Beat.* Yea, and I will weep a while longer.  
*Bene.* I will not desire that.  
*Beat.* You have no reason; I do it freely.



*Bene.* Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

*Beat.* Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her !

*Bene.* Is there any way to show such friendship ?

*Beat.* A very even way, but no such friend.

*Bene.* May a man do it ?

*Beat.* It is a man's office, but not yours.

*Bene.* I do love nothing in the world so well as you : is not that strange ?

*Beat.* As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you : but believe me not ; and yet I lie not ; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing.—I am sorry for my cousin.

*Bene.* By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

*Beat.* Do not swear by it, and eat it.

*Bene.* I will swear by it that you love me ; and I will make him eat it that says I love not you.

*Beat.* Will you not eat your word ?

*Bene.* With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.

*Beat.* Why, then, God forgive me !

*Bene.* What offence, sweet Beatrice ?

*Beat.* You have stayed me in a happy hour : I was about to protest I loved you.

*Bene.* And do it with all thy heart.

*Beat.* I love you with so much of my heart, that none is left to protest."

The reader will observe, that in the very confession of their love they cannot forswear their wit, and each maintains it throughout the conversation.

Their rival wits are in conflict to the last, even to the very steps of the altar:—

" *Marg.* Well, I will call Beatrice to you, who I think hath legs. [Exit Margaret.]

*Bene.* And therefore will come. [Singing.]

*The god of love,*

*That sits above,*

*And knows me, and knows me,*

*How pitiful I deserve,—*

I mean in singing ; but in loving,—Leander the good swimmer Troilus the first employer of panders, and a whole book full of these quondam carpet-mongers, whose names yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse,—why, they were never so truly turned over and over as my poor self in love. Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme ; I have tried : I can find out no rhyme to 'lady' but 'baby,'—an innocent rhyme ; for 'scorn,' 'horn,'—a hard rhyme ; for 'school,' 'fool,'—a

babbling rhyme ; very ominous endings : no, I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms.

*Enter BEATRICE.*

Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee ?

*Beat.* Yea, signior, and depart when you bid me.

*Bene.* O, stay but till then !

*Beat.* 'Then' is spoken ; fare you well now :—and yet, ere I go, let me go with that I came for ; which is, with knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.

*Bene.* Only foul words ; and thereupon I will kiss thee.

*Beat.* Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome ; therefore I will depart unknissed.

*Bene.* Thou hast frightened the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit. But I must tell thee plainly, Claudio undergoes my challenge ; and either I must shortly hear from him, or I will subscribe him a coward. And, I pray thee now, tell me for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me ?

*Beat.* For them all together ; which maintained so politic a state of evil, that they will not admit of any good part to intermingle with them. But for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me ?

*Bene.* 'Suffer love'—a good epithet ! I do suffer love, indeed, for I love thee against my will.

*Beat.* In spite of your heart, I think ; alas, poor heart ! If you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours ; for I will never love that which my friend hates.

*Bene.* Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

*Beat.* It appears not in this confession : There's not one wise man in twenty that will praise himself."

And again at a later meeting, at the very end of the play, Beatrice cannot forego or abate her banter ; she maintains her spirit to the last.

" *Bene.* Do not you love me ?

*Beat.* Why, no : no more than reason.

*Bene.* Why, then your uncle, and the prince, and Claudio Have been deceived ; for they swore you did.

*Beat.* Do not you love me ?

*Bene.* Troth, no ; no more than reason.

*Beat.* Why, then my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula Are much deceiv'd ; for they did swear you did.

*Bene.* They swore that you were almost sick for me.

*Beat.* They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

*Bene.* 'Tis no such matter.—Then you do not love me ?

*Beat.* No, truly, but in friendly recompense.

*Leon.* Come, cousin, I'm sure you love the gentleman.

*Claud.* And I'll be sworn upon't that he loves her ;  
For here's a paper, written in his hand,  
A halting sonnet of his own pure brain,  
Fashion'd to Beatrice.

*Hero.* And here's another,  
Writ in my cousin's hand, stol'n from her pocket,  
Containing her affection unto Benedick.

*Bene.* A miracle ! here's our own hands against our hearts.  
—Come, I will have thee ; but, by this light, I take thee for  
pity.

*Beat.* I would not deny you ;—but, by this good day, I  
yield upon great persuasion ; and partly to save your life,  
for I was told you were in a consumption.

*Bene.* Peace ! I will stop your mouth. [*Kissing her.*]

*D. Pedro.* How dost thou, Benedick, the married man ?

*Bene.* I'll tell thee what, prince ; a college of wit-crackers  
cannot flout me out of my humour. Dost thou think I care  
for a satire or an epigram ? No : if a man will be beaten  
with brains, he shall wear nothing handsome about him. In  
brief, since I do purpose to marry, I will think nothing to any  
purpose that the world can say against it ; and therefore  
never flout at me for what I have said against it ; for man is  
a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion.—For thy part,  
Claudio, I did think to have beaten thee ; but in that thou  
art like to be my kinsman, live unbruised, and love my cousin.

*Bene.* Come, come, we are friends.—Let's have a dance  
ere we are married, that we may lighten our hearts, and our  
wives' heels."

A very appropriate conclusion to so witty and  
entertaining a play.

There is a general concurrence of critical opinion  
that *Love's Labour's Lost* was one of Shakespeare's  
earliest productions.

It is evidently the work of a young man. It abounds  
from the first page to the last in wit, satire, merriment,  
and hilarity, and it seems incredible that any brain,  
jaded by years of work or experience, could have con-  
densed so much amusement into so short a space.  
Its vitality and action are astonishing.

"It is very certain," says Collier, "that Biron and  
Rosaline are early sketches of two characters to which  
Shakespeare subsequently gave greater force and effect  
—Benedick and Beatrice ; but this only shows what

cannot be doubted, that *Love's Labour's Lost* was anterior in composition to *Much Ado About Nothing*."

There is a strong similarity between the two couples, but Benedick and Beatrice are portrayed by a firmer and maturer hand than are Biron and Rosaline; they are outlined more clearly and with greater artistic finish.

"I can never sufficiently admire"—says Coleridge, in his "Literary Remains"—"the wonderful activity of thought throughout the whole of the first scene of the play, rendered natural, as it is, by the choice of the characters, and the whimsical determination on which the drama is founded—a whimsical determination certainly, yet not altogether so very improbable to those who are conversant in the history of the middle ages, with their courts of love and all the lighter drapery of chivalry."

In this play even Shakespeare's self-control seems for once almost incapable of keeping within bounds his own exuberant wit, fancy, and imagination. Every one of the characters, with the possible exception of the serious-minded king of Navarre himself—the first, by the way, to forswear in his heart at any rate, the very oaths he had imposed on himself and others—and the constable, Dull—who was not so very dull after all—are exceedingly witty and satirical.

The Lord Biron is the leading satirist, and all the other characters in the play take, more or less, their lead and tone from him. Armado, represents the Spanish gallant and braggart. He is a braggart, but at the same time kindhearted, and amusing, which braggarts usually are not. Old Holofernes represents the typical pedant, but he, too, though pretentious and exacting, has a fund of hidden humour that peeps out in his utterances.

There is a purpose in the play—a moral purpose if you will. It is a satire on hurriedly framed youthful associations, formed to be an example to mankind, and to set the world right in a hurry. This, in this case, very limited society, binds itself by all sorts of impossible oaths to study virtue and knowledge, to set itself so to speak on a pedestal, for their better cultivation, and thereby to shame the world and obtain for itself exceptional renown.

Let Professor Dowden describe its formation, its *raison d'être*, and its collapse:—

“The King of Navarre and his young lords had resolved for a definite period of time to circumscribe their beings and their lives with a little code of rules.

“They had designed to enclose a little favoured park in which ideas should rule to the exclusion of the blind and rude forces of nature. They were pleased to rearrange human character and human life, so that it might accord with their idealistic scheme of self-development. The court was to be a little *Academe*; no woman was to be looked at for the space of three years; food and sleep were to be placed under precise regulation. And the result is, what? That human nature refuses to be dealt with in this fashion of arbitrary selection and rejection.

“The youthful idealists had supposed that they would form a little group of select and refined ascetics of knowledge and culture; it was quickly proved that they were men. The play is Shakespeare’s declaration in the favour of the fact as it is. Here, he says, we are with such and such appetites and passions. Let us, in any scheme of self-development, get *that* fact acknowledged at all events. Otherwise we shall quickly enough betray ourselves as arrant fools, fit to be flouted by women, and needing to learn from them

a portion of their directness, practicability, and good sense."

Let us turn to the articles of association, framed and promulgated by the king himself, and see their provisos and contents—

*King.* Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,  
Live registered upon our brazen tombs,  
And then grace us in the disgrace of death ;  
When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,  
Th' endeavour of this present breath may buy  
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,  
And make us heirs of all eternity.  
Therefore, brave conquerors,—for so you are,  
That war against your own affections,  
And the huge army of the world's desires,—  
Our late edict shall strongly stand in force :  
Navarre shall be the wonder of the world ;  
Our court shall be a little Academe,  
Still and contemplative in living art.  
You three, Birón, Dumain, and Longaville,  
Have sworn for three years' term to live with me  
My fellow-scholars, and to keep those statutes  
That are recorded in this schedule here :  
Your oaths are pass'd ; and now subscribe your names,  
That his own hand may strike his honour down  
That violates the smallest branch herein :  
If you are arm'd to do as sworn to do,  
Subscribe to your deep oaths, and keep it too.

*Long.* I am resolv'd ; 'tis but a three years' fast.  
The mind shall banquet, though the body pine :  
Fat paunches have lean pates ; and dainty bits  
Make rich the ribs, but bankrupt quite the wits.

*Dum.* My loving lord, Dumain is mortified :  
The grosser manner of these world's delights  
He throws upon the gross world's baser slaves :  
To love, to wealth, to pomp, I pine and die ;  
With all these living in philosophy.

*Biron.* I can but say their protestation over ;  
So much, dear liege, I have already sworn,  
That is, to live and study here three years.  
But there are other strict observances :  
As, not to see a woman in that term,—  
Which I hope well is not enrollèd there ;  
And one day in a week to touch no food,  
And but one meal on every day beside,—  
The which I hope is not enrollèd there ;  
And then, to sleep but three hours in the night,  
And not be seen to wink of all the day



(When I was wont to think no harm all night,  
And make a dark night too of half the day),—  
Which I hope well is not enroli'd there :  
O, these are barren tasks, too hard to keep,—  
Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep !

*King.* Your oath is pass'd to pass away from these.

*Biron.* Let me say no, my liege, an if you please :  
I only swore to study with your grace,  
And stay here in your court for three years' space.

*Long.* You swore to that, Birón, and to the rest.

*Biron.* By yea and nay, sir, then I swore in jest.—  
What is the end of study ? let me know.

*King.* Why, that to know, which else we should not know.

*Biron.* Things hid and barr'd, you mean, from common  
sense ?

*King.* Ay, that is study's god-like recompense.

*Biron.* Come on, then ; I will swear to study so,  
To know the thing I am forbid to know :  
As thus,—to study where I well may dine,

When I to feast expressly am forbid ;  
Or study where to meet some mistress fine,  
When mistresses from common sense are hid ;  
Or, having sworn too hard-a-keeping oath,  
Study to break it, and not break my troth.

If study's gain be this, and this be so,  
Study knows that which yet it doth not know :  
Swear me to this, and I will ne'er say no.

*King.* These be the steps that hinder study quite,  
And train our intellects to vain delight."

Biron is doubtless here the mouthpiece and exponent of Shakespeare himself. To oblige the king he was willing to sign the articles in a general way, but when it came to such stringent particulars as:—

"Not to see women, study, fast, not sleep,

his amorous and easy-going nature very naturally demurred.

However, under pressure, he reluctantly gives his oath, and puts his hand to all the regulations, doubtless, with his tongue in his cheek, and with many mental reservations, determined to trust to time and to avail himself of the first plausible piece of mental casuistry that presented itself to his mind, to enable him to escape from this self-imposed imprisonment.



Biron knew human nature better than his colleagues, and was well aware that the force of circumstances and the temptations of life would soon disperse to the wind and crumble into dust this prettily devised little academic institution.

“Necessity will make us all forsworn.”

Shakespeare, through the mouth of Biron, with that condensed felicity of language of which he alone is the master, exposes the valuelessness, nay, the absolute loss, not infrequently occasioned by mere book-learning and the poring over books, compared with the knowledge and pleasure experienced by direct intercourse with life and one's fellows, and the immediate contact of the human senses, each with each. He shows how it rather stultifies the understanding than quickens the senses, and how the little inner light that one may possess is frequently lost by the pursuit of more light in the gloomy obscurity of books.

“*Biron.* Why, all delights are vain ; but that most vain,  
Which, with pain purchas'd, doth inherit pain :  
As, painfully to pore upon a book

To seek the light of truth ; while truth the while  
Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look :

Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile :  
So, ere you find where light in darkness lies,  
Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes.  
Study me how to please the eye indeed,

By fixing it upon a fairer eye ;  
Who dazzling so, that eye shall be his heed,  
And give him light that it was blinded by.  
Study is like the heaven's glorious sun

That will not be deep searched with saucy looks ;  
Small have continued plodders ever won,

Save base authority from other's books  
These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights

That give a name to every fixed star,  
Have no more profit of their shining nights

Than those that walk, and wot not what they are  
Too much to know is to know nought but fame ;  
And every God-father can give a name.

*King.* How well he's read, to reason against reading !

*Dum.* Proceeded well, to stop all good proceeding.”

Biron had not long to wait for his opportunity of release. A princess of France arrives with a bevy of fair women in her train, and seeks an audience of the King of Navarre, on an important mission of state. The four academic conspirators are captivated by their beauty, and all four almost on the instant lose their heads, and surrender their hearts to these fascinating ladies. The king succumbs to the princess, Biron to Rosaline, Dumaine to Katherine, and Longaville to Maria.

It is a curious fact, worthy of note, and the author believes that he is right in his assertion that nowhere in Shakespeare do you find two men quarrelling seriously about the same woman. If they do quarrel for a time, as, for instance, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the quarrel is only temporary and soon set right, and patched up without any serious consequences.

There is an amusing little difficulty at the outset; the king had forbidden by an oath the entertainment of any woman at his house. What was to be done, the princess was at hand?

“ *King*. What say you, lords? why, this was quite forgot.

*Biron*. So study evermore is overshot:  
While it doth study to have what it would  
And when it hath the thing it hunteth most,  
’Tis won as towns with fire,—so won, so lost.”

So necessity compels them to await the princess in the fields.

“ *Enter King, LONGAVILLE, DUMAIN, BIRON, and Attendants.*

*King*. Fair princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.

*Prin*. ‘Fair’ I give you back again; and ‘welcome’ I have not yet: the roof of this court is too high to be yours; and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine.

*King*. You shall be welcome, madam, to my court.

*Prin*. I will be welcome, then: conduct me thither.

*King*. Hear me, dear lady,—I have sworn an oath.

*Prin*. Our Lady help my lord! he’ll be forsworn.

*King*. Not for the world, fair madam, by my will.

*Prin.* Why, will shall break it ; will, and nothing else.

*King.* Your ladyship is ignorant what 'tis.

*Prin.* Were my lord so, his ignorance were wise,  
Where now his knowledge must prove ignorance.

I hear your grace hath sworn-out house-keeping :

'Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord,

Not sin to break it.

But pardon me, I am too sudden-bold :

To teach a teacher ill beseemeth me.

Vouchsafe to read the purpose of my coming,

And suddenly resolve me in my suit. [Gives a paper.]

*King.* Madam, I will, if suddenly I may.

*Prin.* You will the sooner, that I were away ;  
For you'll prove perjur'd, if you make me stay."

Biron had not long to await the *dénouement* and to see his expectations fulfilled. He was well assured in his own mind that the king and the rest had already forsworn themselves. He only needed confirmation. The king enters in a meditative mood, reading a paper. Biron gets up a tree and overhears the recital of his sonnet to the princess.

Longaville arrives on the scene almost immediately, likewise reading his sonnet to Maria.

" *Long.* Ay me, I am forsworn.

*King* [*aside*]. In love, I hope, sweet fellowship in shame !

*Biron* [*aside*]. One drunkard loves another of the name."

Dumain is the last to appear :—

" *Dumain.* O most divine Kate ! "

and reads :—

" On a day—alack the day !

Love whose month is even May

Spied a blossom passing fair

Floating in the wanton air," etc.

Biron now has the whip hand of them all. He has proof positive of their perjury, but they are unaware of his. He leaps triumphantly from the tree, and accuses them :—

" *Biron.* Now step I forth to whip hypocrisy.

[Descends from the tree.]

Ah, good my liege, I pray thee, pardon me !

Good heart, what grace hast thou, thus to reprove  
 These worms for loving, that art most in love ?  
 Your eyes do make no coaches ; in your tears  
 There is no certain princess that appears ;  
 You'll not be perjur'd, 'tis a hateful thing ;  
 Tush, none but minstrels like of sonneting !  
 But are you not asham'd ? nay, are you not,  
 All three of you, to be thus much o'ershot ?  
 You found his mote ; the king your mote did see ;  
 But I a beam do find in each of three."

But Biron's own turn is soon to come. Costard, the clown enters, and throws down among the quartette Biron's own mis-delivered love message to Rosaline. So all four stand confessed perjurers facing each other. The nimble-witted Biron is equal to the occasion :—

" *Biron.* Sweet lords, sweet lovers, O, let us embrace !  
 As true we are as flesh and blood can be :  
 The sea will ebb and flow, heaven show his face ;  
 Young blood doth but obey an old decree :  
 We cannot cross the cause why we were born ;  
 Therefore of all hands must we be forsworn."

And then suggests that they should all carry the war into the ladies' camp, which they accordingly proceeded to do.

The play is brought to a conclusion by the sudden death of the King of France ; and the princess and her ladies are summoned instantly to return. The king and his lords make a final appeal to the princess, and their respective lovers :—

" *King.* Now, at the latest minute of the hour,  
 Grant us your loves.

*Prin.* A time methinks too short  
 To make a world—without—and bargain in.  
 No, no, my lord, your grace is perjur'd much  
 Full of dear guiltiness ; and therefore this :—  
 If for my love—as there is no such cause—  
 You will do ought, this shall you do for me :  
 Your oath I will not trust : but go with speed  
 To some forlorn and naked hermitage,  
 Remote from all the pleasures of the world ;  
 There stay until the twelve celestial signs  
 Have brought about the annual reckoning  
 If this austere insociable life

Change not your offer made in heat of blood ;  
 Then, at the expiration of the year,  
 Come challenge, challenge me by these deserts,  
 And, by this virgin palm now kissing thine,  
 I will be thine ; and, till that instant, shut  
 My woful self up in a mourning house,  
 Raining the tears of lamentation  
 For the remembrance of my father's death.  
 If this thou do deny, let our hands part ;  
 Neither intitled in the other's heart.

*King.* If this, or more than this, I would deny,  
 To flatter up these powers of mine with rest,  
 The sudden hand of death close up mine eye !  
 Hence ever, then, my heart is in thy breast.

*Dum.* But what to me, my love ? but what to me ?  
 A wife ?

*Kath.* A beard, fair health, and honesty ;  
 With threefold love I wish you all these three.

*Dum.* O, shall I say, I thank you, gentle wife ?

*Kath.* Not so, my lord ;—a twelvemonth and a day  
 I'll mark no words that smooth-fac'd wooers say :  
 Come when the king doth to my lady come ;  
 Then, if I have much love, I'll give you some.

*Dum.* I'll serve thee true and faithfully till then.

*Kath.* Yet swear not, lest ye be forsworn agen.

*Long.* What says Maria ?

*Mar.* At the twelvemonth's end  
 I'll change my black gown for a faithful friend.

*Long.* I'll stay with patience ; but the time is long.

*Mar.* The liker you ; few taller are so young.

*Biron.* Studies my lady ? mistress, look on me ;  
 Behold the window of my heart, mine eye,  
 What humble suit attends thy answer there :  
 Impose some service on me for thy love.

*Ros.* Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Biron,  
 Before I saw you ; and the world's large tongue  
 Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks,  
 Full of comparisons and wounding flouts,  
 Which you on all estates will execute  
 That lie within the mercy of your wit.  
 To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain,  
 And therewithal to win me, if you please,—  
 Without the which I am not to be won,—  
 You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day  
 Visit the speechless sick, and still converse  
 With groaning wretches ; and your task shall be,  
 With all the fierce endeavour of your wit  
 T' enforce the pained impotent to smile.

*Biron.* To move wild laughter in the throat of death!  
 It cannot be ; it is impossible :  
 Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

*Ros.* Why, that's the way to choke a gibling spirit,  
 Whose influence is begot of that loose grace  
 Which shallow-laughing hearers give to fools :  
 A jest's prosperity lies in the ear  
 Of him that hears it, never in the tongue  
 Of him that makes it : then, if sickly ears,  
 Deaf'd with the clamours of their own dear groans,  
 Will hear your idle scorns, continue them,  
 And I will have you and that fault withal ;  
 But if they will not, throw away that spirit,  
 And I shall find you empty of that fault,  
 Right joyful of your reformation.

*Biron.* A twelvemonth ! well, befall what will befall,  
 I'll jest a twelvemonth in an hospital."

Shakespeare, it will be noticed, does not let the youthful perjurers escape free, they are each sentenced to a year of durance vile before they may be possessed of their heart's desire.

Poor Armado the Spanish braggart, has less than justice dealt out to him. He at least was no perjurer, and yet his sentence is three times heavier than the rest. He is condemned "to hold the plough," not for one year, but for three, before he may enjoy the society of the lady's maid Taquenetta.

Possibly Shakespeare thought that it would take at least three years to knock the braggart and coxcomb out of Armado ; and after reading Armado's epistolary declaration of love to Taquenetta, one is inclined to agree with Shakespeare. The letter is intensely diverting. It is written in the high salutin style, the *de haut en bas*, the King Cophetua to the beggar, the haughty condescension of the hooked-nosed fellow of Rome, towards a humble and isolated maid. Here it is:—

" *Boyet.* [*reads*]. By heaven, that thou art fair, is most infallible ; true, that thou art beauteous ; truth itself, that thou art lovely. More fairer than fair, beautiful than beauteous, truer than truth itself, have commiseration on thy heroical vassal ! The magnanimous and most illustre king Cophetua set eye upon the pernicious and indubitate beggar Penelophon ; and he it was that might rightly say, *Veni, vidi, vici* ; which to anatomize in the vulgar,—O base and



obscure vulgar !—*videlicet*, he came, saw, and overcame : he came, one ; saw, two ; overcame, three. Who came ? the king : why did he come ? to see : why did he see ? to overcome : to whom came he ? to the beggar : what saw he ? the beggar : who overcame he ? the beggar. The conclusion is victory : on whose side ? the king's. The captive is enriched : on whose side ? the beggar's. The catastrophe is a nuptial : on whose side ? the king's,—no, on both in one, or one in both. I am the king ; for so stands the comparison : thou the beggar ; for so witnesseth thy lowliness. Shall I command thy love ? I may : shall I enforce thy love ? I could : shall I entreat thy love ? I will. What shalt thou exchange for rags ? robes ; for tittles ? titles ; for thyself ? me. Thus, expecting thy reply, I profane my lips on thy foot, my eyes on thy picture, and my heart on thy every part.—Thine, in the dearest design of industry,

DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO.

*Thus dost thou hear the Nemean lion roar  
'Gainst thee, thou lamb, that standest as his prey.  
Submissive fall his princely feet before,  
And he from forage will incline to play :  
But if thou strive, poor soul, what art thou then ?  
Food for his rage, repasture for his den.*

*Prin.* What plume of feathers is he that indited this letter ? What vane ? what weathercock ? did you ever hear better ? "

Old Dull the constable, could be witty on occasion, but only on occasion. Like many dull people he rather resented the imputation of stupidity, and set himself furiously to think how he could remove the misconception. He invented a poser or what he thought would be one, for his intellectual superiors :—

" *Dull.* You two are book-men : can you tell by your wit What was a month old at Cain's birth, that's not five weeks old as yet ?

*Hol.* Dictynna, goodman Dull ; Dictynna, goodman Dull.

*Dull.* What is Dictynna ?

*Nath.* A title to Phœbe, to Luna, to the moon.

*Hol.* The moon was a month old when Adam was no more, And raught not to five weeks when he came to five-score.

The allusion holds in the exchange.

*Dull.* 'Tis true indeed ; the collusion holds in the exchange.

*Hol.* God comfort thy capacity ! I saw the allusion holds in the exchange.

*Dull.* And I say the pollution holds in the exchange ; for the moon is never but a month old."

The riddle was ingenious, and Dull deserved a better fate.

Holofernes is the pedant *par excellence*. He was fond



of ingenious and dry disquisition. He used long words, many words, Latin words, after the manner of his kind, flavoured with a fund of rather dry wit. His learning was largely affected to overawe the vulgar:—

“ *Nath.* I praise God for you, sir : your reasons at dinner have been sharp and sententious ; pleasant without scurrility, witty without affection, audacious without impudency, learned without opinion, and strange without heresy. I did converse this *quondam* day with a companion of the king’s, who is intitled, nominated, or called, Don Adriano de Armado.

*Hol.* *Novi hominem tanquam te :* his honour is lofty, his discourse peremptory, his tongue filed, his eye ambitious, his gait majestical, and his general behaviour vain, ridiculous, and thrasonical. He is too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd, as it were, too peregrinate, as I may call it.

*Nath.* A most singular and choice epithet.

[ *Takes out his table-book.*

*Hol.* He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument. I abhor such fanatical phantasms, such insociable and point-devise companions ; such rackers of orthography, as to speak ‘dout,’ fine, when he should say ‘doubt’ ; ‘det,’ when he should pronounce ‘debt,’—d, e, b, t, not d, e, t : he clepeth a ‘calf,’ ‘cauf’ ; ‘half,’ ‘hauf’ ; ‘neighbour,’ *vocatur* ‘nebour’ ; ‘neigh’ abbreviated ‘ne.’ This is abominable,—which he would call abominable : it insinuateth one of *insanire* ; *ne intelligis, domine ?* to wax frantic, lunatic.”

Armado in his affected manner, called the afternoon the posterior of the day.

“ *Arm.* Sir, it is the king’s most sweet pleasure and affection to congratulate the princess at her pavilion in the posterior of the day, which the rude multitude call the afternoon.

*Hol.* The posterior of the day, most generous sir, is liable, congruent and measurable for the afternoon : the word is well called, choice ; sweet and apt, I do assure you, sir, I do assure.”

On reading *Love’s Labour’s Lost* one calls to mind a little society that was initiated not so very long ago, originated and promoted by a few choice spirits among the elect ladies and illuminati of Oxford. It was proposed to call it the Society of Souls. The late Lord Justice Bowen was sounded for a title. He suggested, alas ! not “souls,” but “para-souls.” But little more was heard of this promising child.

## CHAPTER X

### SHAKESPEARE : HIS FANCY

ON entering on the play of *As You Like It*, we are in the region, not precisely of fairy-land, but of fancy. Fancy, not wit and satire, is so to speak, of the essence of the play. Not that wit and satire are by any means left behind, they abound and flourish in it; but still *As You Like It* is essentially fancy's realm, and fancy reigns supreme; and very fresh, beautiful, and happy fancy it all is.

*As You Like It* is a gem of the first water, and whether the pick of the basket or not, must be left for the taste of the individual to decide. Comparisons are "odorous," as old Dogberry would say, so we will leave comparisons alone.

Coleridge eloquently and justly praises its pastoral beauty and simplicity. "Shakespeare," says Coleridge, "never gives a description of rustic scenery merely for its own sake, or to show how well he can paint natural objects: he is never tedious or elaborate, but while he now and then displays marvellous accuracy and minuteness of knowledge, he usually only touches upon the larger features and broader characteristics, leaving the fillings up to the imagination. Thus in *As You Like It* he describes an oak of many centuries growth in a single line:—

' Under an oak whose antique root peeps out.'

“Other and inferior writers would have dwelt on this description, and worked it out with all the pettiness and impertinence of detail. In Shakespeare the ‘antique root’ furnishes the whole picture.”

It is a small matter, but one that has sometimes puzzled the author, as to what Shakespeare precisely means by the words, “As You Like It.” Does he mean that this is ‘as you like it,’ or this should suit your taste? Or does he mean, take it as you please? —put what construction you like upon it!

The play is not only founded on, but in some parts very closely copied from a novel by Thomas Lodge, under the title of “Rosalynde : Euphues Golden Legacie,” which was originally published in 1590 and again in 1598. *As You Like It* may have been written in the summer of 1598, and first acted in the winter of the same year.

Dowden asserts that Shakespeare wrote it as a change from, and relaxation after the long strain of his historical plays, the series of which he had just brought to a conclusion.

“Shakespeare, when he had completed his English historical plays, needed rest for his imagination; and in such a mood, craving refreshment and recreation, he wrote his play of *As You Like It*. To understand the spirit of this play, we must bear in mind that it was written immediately after Shakespeare’s great series of histories, ending with *Henry V.* (1599), and before he began the great series of tragedies Shakespeare turned with a sense of relief, and a long easeful sigh, from the oppressive subjects of history, so grave, so real, so massive, and found rest and freedom and pleasure in escape from courts and camps to the Forest of Arden:—

‘ Who doth ambition shun  
And loves to live i’ the sun  
Come hither, come hither, come hither.’ ”

The play is as has been said, a very beautiful one, and deservedly a great favourite, with readers, spectators, and actors alike. Using the word in its truest and widest sense, there is perhaps, more true poetry, or for preference to use an old-fashioned word "poesy," in it, than in any of Shakespeare's pieces. There is an open air joyousness, and a touch of the Robinson Crusoe about it all.

Here we find men and women, alone with Nature, and all in a very happy frame of mind. One can hardly help exclaiming, "Oh, if life were really like that, and could remain so, how delightful it all would be." Though all the characters are more or less in misfortune, they all unite to make the best of it, enjoy themselves immensely, the lovers are respectively united, and all comes right to all in the end.

But into the midst of this company is intruded an eccentric, railling, and rather unaccountable personality, generally designated as "the melancholy Jaques." Now what business had Jaques with his melancholy, or whatever his malady was in the piece at all? Why was he pitchforked into it?

He is Shakespeare's own particular creation. "Shakespeare," says Collier, "found no prototypes in Lodge, or in any other work yet discovered for the characters of Jaques, Touchstone, and Audrey. On the admirable manner in which he has made them part of the staple of his story, and on the importance of these additions it is needless to enlarge."

The remark holds good as regards Touchstone and Audrey, but hardly as regards Jaques himself.

Jaques has really nothing to do with the staple of the story; he is not one of the company, he is usually in solitude, but rarely appears, says very little, and what he does say is usually satirical, railling, or con-

demnatory. He pulls every one up, and makes game of them all. He is no more one of the company than a referee at a football match can be said to be one of the team. The play would have gone on just as well, and possibly more merrily without him. Jaques is in the company but not of it; he had no real interest in the others. If their inferior in their capacity for enjoyment, he was their superior or so he thought, in everything else. He treats them all from the Duke downwards as almost beneath his notice, and as quite his intellectual inferiors. He flits in and out at odd and end moments, with no apparent object than to vent his humours, and knock other people over the knuckles. There is a mystery about him somewhere; let us look a little closer and endeavour to discover in what that mystery consists.

There are various theories about him. What do the critics say?

"The play has been represented," says Professor Dowden, "by one of its recent editors as an early attempt made by the poet to control the dark spirit of melancholy in himself, 'by thinking it away.' The characters of the banished Duke of Orlando, of Rosalind are described as three gradations of cheerfulness in adversity, with Jaques placed over against them in designed contrast. But no real adversity has come to any one of them. Shakespeare, when he put into the Duke's mouth the words:—

'Sweet are the uses of adversity,'

knew something of deeper affliction than a life in the golden leisure of Arden."

Here let us pause to remark that the misfortunes of the Duke, of Orlando, and of Rosalind were heavy enough.

The Duke had been deprived of everything by a

usurping brother, and would in these days have been in the workhouse instead of in the woods. Orlando, by another brother, selfish and browbeating, was cast on the world to seek his living as best he could.

Rosalind's treatment was still worse, for she was cast forth to wander whither she would, and to experience what fortune chance might happen to provide. So their afflictions were not so trifling as Dowden intimates. He then proceeds:—

“Of real melancholy there is none in the play: for the melancholy of Jaques is not grave and earnest, but a self-indulgent humour, a petted foible of character, melancholy prepense, and cultivated.”

According to Jaques himself, his melancholy was a malady of a mixed nature. It was certainly not assumed, but for the time deep-seated and sincere:—

“*Jaq.* I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these;—but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, which, by often rumination, wraps me in a most humorous sadness.”

And then he adds with significance:—

“Yes, I have gained my experience.”

He means that this compound affliction from which he is suffering is due to many causes, and is of a different nature to what is usually understood by the word melancholy. Surely Moberly is right here, and Jaques is the exponent of Shakespeare's own temporary troubles. Jaques throughout appears slightly hysterical.

Is Shakespeare himself, as Moberly suggests, experiencing for the time being the very malady with which he represents Jaques as afflicted? Shakespeare

is, as a rule joyous, buoyant, and optimistic; but he, too must have had his moods and dark hours. A man of his thoughtful and sensitive nature must have had moments of reaction, when his mental sufferings were considerable; he, like others, must have felt the slights, rebuffs, and indifference of the world, and the rivalries and jealousies of his colleagues.

"Those," says Byron, "who ascend the mountain-tops must look down on the hate of those below." What more probable than that just at the time when he was wearied and worn with his exhaustive historical labours, he should be in much the same mental attitude towards his fellows as he represents Jaques to be?

He had, some years before, retired from his company of fellow-actors, disgusted with their jealousy and defamation: so complete on that occasion was his isolation that Spenser refers to him as "dead," because he:—

"Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,  
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell."

As a rule he mocks at melancholy, and keeps it at a distance if he can, and now the fit was upon himself, and what more probable than that as Moberly suggests, he was endeavouring to keep it under and think it away by returning to his native place and there writing a beautiful play, with its venue in the woods, and away from the haunts of men?

Shakespeare intends the play to be sweet, not sour, and entirely happy in its conclusion; and so it is. But he realised as an artist, that it would not be entirely true to life if there were no exception in it to the general felicity. He knew, better than most men, that there is a thorn in every rose, and a tear behind every eye.

Moreover, he is in a state of melancholy and irrita-



bility himself, and even in the piece he cannot hide it and keep it entirely out of sight. So he projects the shadow of his own sorrow in the person of Jaques into the piece itself. This suggestion of Moberly's is extremely plausible, and has much to commend it. Let us see how far the behaviour and bearing of Jaques supports this view. The first we hear of Jaques is not from his own mouth, but from one of the lords attendant on the Duke:—

*“ First Lord.* The melancholy Jaques grieves at that ;  
And, in that kind, swears you do more usurp  
Than doth your brother that hath banish'd you.  
To-day my Lord of Amiens and myself  
Did steal behind him, as he lay along  
Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out  
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood :  
To the which place a poor sequester'd stag,  
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,  
Did come to languish ; and, indeed, my lord,  
The wretched animal heav'd forth such groans,  
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat  
Almost to bursting ; and the big round tears  
Cours'd one another down his innocent nose  
In piteous chase : and thus the hairy fool,  
Much markèd of the melancholy Jaques,  
Stood on th' extremest verge of the swift brook,  
Augmenting it with tears.

*Duke S.* But what said Jaques ?  
Did he not moralize this spectacle ?

*First Lord.* O, yes, into a thousand similes.  
First, for his weeping in the needless stream ;  
' Poor deer,' quoth he, ' thou mak'st a testament  
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more  
To that which had too much : ' then, being alone,  
Left and abandon'd of his velvet friends ;  
' 'Tis right,' quoth he ; ' thus misery doth part  
The flux of company : ' anon, a careless herd,  
Full of the pasture, jumps along by him,  
And never stays to greet him ; ' Ay,' quoth Jaques,  
' Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens ;  
'Tis just the fashion : wherefore do you look  
Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there ? '  
Thus most invectively he pierceth through  
The body of the country, city, court,  
Yea, and of this our life : swearing that we  
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,

To fright the animals, and to kill them up,  
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place.

*Duke S.* And did you leave him in this contemplation ?

*Sec. Lord.* We did, my lord, weeping and commenting  
Upon the sobbing deer.

*Duke S.* Show me the place :  
I love to cope him in these sullen fits,  
For then he's full of matter.

*First Lord.* I'll bring you to him straight. [Exeunt.]

Jaques was alone and weeping over the wounded deer, typifying down-trodden and weeping humanity. Was Shakespeare weeping too? It looks like it!

"Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens ;  
'Tis just the fashion : wherefore do you look  
Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there ?"

It calls to mind what Shakespeare says elsewhere :—

"Why let the stricken deer go weep,  
The hart ungalled play."

On his next appearance Jaques is laughing almost hysterically, and about very little indeed. He has met Touchstone, whom he calls a fool :—

"Oh noble fool, oh motley fool,  
Motley's the only wear."

Touchstone was no fool, but a very sharp-witted and amusing rascal. Jaques rather means that he was a "cure," a curio, or curiosity. A curiosity Touchstone certainly was, one of those individuals of the hop, skip, and jump order, touching now one stone with his foot, and now another.

"Enter JAQUES.

*Duke S.* Why, how now, monsieur ! what a life is this,  
That your poor friends must woo your company !  
What, you look merrily !

*Jaq.* A fool, a fool !—I met a fool i' the forest,  
A motley fool ;—a miserable world !—

As I do live by food, I met a fool ;  
Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,  
And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms,  
In good set terms,—and yet a motley fool.

'Good morrow, fool,' quoth I. 'No, sir,' quoth he,

'Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune.'  
 And then he drew a dial from his poke,  
 And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye,  
 Says very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock :  
 Thus we may see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags :  
 'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine ;  
 And after one hour more 'twill be eleven ;  
 And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,  
 And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot ;  
 And thereby hangs a tale.' When I did hear  
 The motley fool thus moral on the time,  
 My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,  
 That fools should be so deep-contemplative ;  
 And I did laugh sans intermission  
 An hour by his dial.—O noble fool !  
 A worthy fool !—Motley's the only wear.

*Duke S.* What fool is this ?

*Jaq.* O worthy fool !—One that hath been a courtier ;  
 And says, if ladies be but young and fair,  
 They have the gift to know't : and in his brain,—  
 Which is as dry as the remainder biscuit  
 After a voyage,—he hath strange places cramm'd  
 With observation, the which he vents  
 In mangled forms.—O, that I were a fool !  
 I am ambitious for a motley coat.

*Duke S.* Thou shalt have one.

*Jaq.* It is my only suit ;  
 Provided that you weed your better judgments  
 Of all opinion that grows rank in them  
 That I am wise. I must have liberty  
 Withal, as large a charter as the wind,  
 To blow on whom I please ; for so fools have :  
 And they that are most gall'd with my folly,  
 They most must laugh. And why, sir, must they so ?  
 The 'why' is plain as way to parish church :  
 He that a fool doth very wisely hit  
 Doth very foolishly, although he smart,  
 But to seem senseless of the bob : if not,  
 The wise man's folly is anatomiz'd  
 Even by the squandering glances of the fool.  
 Invest me in my motley ; give me leave  
 To speak my mind, and I will through and through  
 Cleanse the foul body of th' infected world,  
 If they will patiently receive my medicine."

The "bob" means the trick, but the meaning of the passage is somewhat obscure, and by no means as plain as way to parish church.

It will be noticed that two things here are a necessity

to Jaques, and they were equally indispensable to Shakespeare :—

“I must have liberty,  
Withal as large a charter, as the wind,  
To blow on whom I please.”

and he must have variety :—

“Invest me in my motley ; give me leave  
To speak my mind.”

Shortly after this he appears again, and in the “vanity of vanity” strain gives vent to his immortal soliloquy :—

*Jaq.* All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players ;  
They have their exits and their entrances :  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel,  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier  
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation,  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,  
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances ;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts,  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacle on nose, and pouch on side :  
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank ; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion ;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

He falls foul of Orlando, and this time is in a chaffing mood. He quizzes Orlando about his love for Rosalind, but the wit of Orlando is too much for Jaques, as his wrestling was for Charles, and Jaques departs disconcerted from the interview :—

*Jaq.* By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you.

*Orl.* He is drowned in the brook : look but in, and you shall see him.

*Jaq.* There I shall see mine own figure.

*Orl.* Which I take to be either a fool or a cipher.

*Jaq.* I'll tarry no longer with you : farewell, good Signior Love."

He lectures Touchstone on the impropriety of being married under a bush.

"Get you to Church and have a good Priest, that can tell you what marriage is."

And here Touchstone's knavery appears.

*Touch.* [*Aside*]. I am not in the mind but I were better be married of him than of another, for he is not like to marry me well, and not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife."

He then extracts from Touchstone his recipe for avoiding a duel. You go through seven stages of lying, and then escape from your difficulties with an 'if':—

*Jaq.* But for the seventh cause ; how did you find the quarrel on the seventh cause ?

*Touch.* Upon a lie seven times removed :—bear your body more seeming, Audrey :—as thus, sir. I did dislike the cut of a certain courtier's beard : he sent me word, if I said his beard was not cut well, he was in the mind it was : this is called the Retort Courteous. If I sent him word again, it was not well cut, he would send me word, he cut it to please himself : this is called the Quip Modest. If again, it was not well cut, he disabled my judgment : this is called the Reply Churlish. If again, it was not well cut, he would answer, I spake not true : this is called the Reproof Valiant. If again, it was not well cut, he would say, I lied : this is called the Countercheck Quarrelsome : and so to the Lie Circumstantial and the Lie Direct.

*Jaq.* And how oft did you say, his beard was not well cut ?

*Touch.* I durst go no further than the Lie Circumstantial, nor he durst not give me the Lie Direct ; and so we measured swords and parted.

*Jaq.* Can you nominate in order now the degrees of the lie ?

*Touch.* O sir, we quarrel in print, by the book ; as you have books for good manners : I will name you the degrees. The first, the Retort Courteous ; the second, the Quip Modest ; the third, the Reply Churlish ; the fourth, the Reproof

Valiant ; the fifth, the Countercheck Quarrelsome ; the sixth, the Lie with Circumstance ; the seventh, the Lie Direct. All these you may avoid, but the Lie Direct ; and you may avoid that too with an ' if.' I knew when seven justices could not take up a quarrel ; but when the parties were met themselves, one of them thought but of an ' if,' as, ' If you said so, then I said so ' ; and they shook hands, and swore brothers. Your ' if ' is the only peace-maker ; much virtue in ' if.'

*Jaq.* Is not this a rare fellow, my lord ? he's as good at any thing, and yet a fool.

*Duke S.* He uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that, he shoots his wit."

At the conclusion of the play Jaques has largely recovered his equanimity, for he pronounces on all the parties a sort of final benediction, but declines the invitation to the general wedding. He prefers to consort with the returning but converted, duke ; such very speculative investments as marriages were not to his liking :—

" *Jaq. de B.* He hath.

*Jaq.* To him will I : out of these convertites  
There is much matter to be heard and learn'd.—

You [*to Duke S.*] to your former honour I bequeath ;

Your patience and your virtue well deserve it :—

You [*to Orlando*] to a love that your true faith doth merit :—

You [*to Oliver*] to your land, and love, and great allies :—

You [*to Silvius*] to a long and well-deserv'd bed :—

And you [*to Touchstone*] to wrangling ; for thy loving voyage

Is but for two months victuall'd.—So, to your pleasures :

I am for other than for dancing measures.

*Duke S.* Stay, Jaques, stay."

In Jaques's freedom and variety, at any rate, Shakespeare himself stands revealed.

Jaques is an enigma and an interesting one, one of Shakespeare's moody creations, worthy in his own way to stand beside Hamlet and Prospero, and a very puzzling and remarkable triumvirate they are.

He is certainly at times slightly hysterical, notwithstanding the fact that Shakespeare only once mentions this particular malady, and that in *King Lear* :—

" *Lear.* Hysterica passio, down thou climbing sorrow."



Touchstone is a lower order of being altogether to Jaques, but witty, good-natured, and indispensable.

He was with the ladies from the first, and attends them into exile ; their factotum, at their bid and call, and himself part of the staple of the piece.

The rest of the characters, though anything but commonplace, are within the range of every-day and common experience, whereas Jaques and Touchstone are not.

When we leave behind us the usurping Duke, and Orlando's unnatural brother Oliver, and find ourselves in the Forest of Arden, we are among a delightful company. There is dear old Adam, a devoted and noble-hearted retainer. Rightly does Orlando exclaim:—

“ Oh good old man, how well in thee appears  
The constant service of the antique world.”

And then there is the courtly and kind-hearted banished Duke, who going through the vale of misery uses it for a well ; “sweet” he exclaims, “are the uses of adversity,” and who has rendered his name immortal by one very remarkable address.

“ Sweet are the uses of adversity ;  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head :  
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing :  
I would not change it.”

And Orlando himself, with his manly youth and beauty, generous impulses, and single-hearted devotion to Rosalind, with his pretty and ingenious love-sonnets that he pins on every tree, extolling the excellencies of his affection, and for which he gets chaffed by Jaques, and the vivacious Rosalind herself. Rosalind, with all a woman's wiles, and after the manner of her sex, woos, teases, tempers, and tyrannizes over



Orlando by turns. Her lover she knew, was absolutely in her power, and she could torment him as she pleased. She certainly is an enchanting girl, and can be witty and satirical as the occasion demands, though without the sprightly, polished, and speedy repartee of a Beatrice.

Safe in her disguise, she will educate Orlando, and cure him of his passion:—

*“Orl.* I am he that is so love-shaked: I pray you tell me your remedy.

*Ros.* There is none of my uncle's marks upon you; he taught me how to know a man in love; in which cage of rushes I am sure you are not a prisoner.

*Orl.* What were his marks?

*Ros.* A lean cheek—which you have not; a blue eye and sunken,—which you have not; an unquestionable spirit,—which you have not; a beard neglected,—which you have not;—but I pardon you for that; for simply your having in beard is a younger brother's revenue:—then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation;—but you are no such man,—you are rather point-devise in your accoutrements, as loving yourself than seeming the lover of any other.

*Orl.* Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love.

*Ros.* Me believe it! you may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does: that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired?

*Orl.* I swear to thee, youth, by the white hand of Rosalind, I am that he, that unfortunate he.

*Ros.* But are you so much in love as your rhymes speak?

*Orl.* Neither rhyme nor reason can express how much.

*Ros.* Love is merely a madness; and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary, that the whippers are in love too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel.

*Orl.* Did you ever cure any so?

*Ros.* Yes, one; and in this manner. He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me: at which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing, and liking; proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something, and for no passion truly any

thing, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour : would now like him, now loathe him ; then entertain him, then forswear him ; now weep for him, then spit at him ; that I drave my suitor from his mad humour of love to a loving humour of madness ; which was, to forswear the full stream of the world, and to live in a nook merely monastic. And thus I cured him ; and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep's heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in't.

*Orl.* I would not be cured, youth.

*Ros.* I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind, and come every day to my cote and woo me.

*Orl.* Now, by the faith of my love, I will : tell me where it is.

*Ros.* Go with me to it, and I'll show it you : and, by the way, you shall tell me where in the forest you live. Will you go ?

*Orl.* With all my heart, good youth.

*Ros.* Nay, you must call me Rosalind.—Come, sister, will you go ? *[Exeunt.]*

Orlando, if there is any truth in words and profession, was very hard hit indeed :—

“ *Enter ORLANDO, with a paper, which he hangs on a tree.*

*Orl.* Hang there, my verse, in witness of my love :  
And thou, thrice-crownèd queen of night, survey  
With thy chaste eye, from thy pale sphere above,  
Thy huntress' name, that my full life doth sway.  
O Rosalind ! these trees shall be my books,  
And in their barks my thoughts I'll character ;  
That every eye, which in this forest looks,  
Shall see thy virtue witness'd everywhere.  
Run, run, Orlando ; carve on every tree  
The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she.”

By “unexpressive” Shakespeare means inexpressible.

Milton uses the same word in the same sense, in his *Hymn on the Nativity*.

But Rosalind endeavours to comfort him with the reflection that no man ever yet really died of love.

“ *Orl.* I take some joy to say you are, because I would be talking of her.

*Ros.* Well, in her person, I say,—I will not have you.

*Orl.* Then, in mine own person, I die.

*Ros.* No, faith, die by attorney. The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any

man died in his own person, *videlicet*, in a love-cause. Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club; yet he did what he could to die before; and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander, he would have lived many a fair year, though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer night; for, good youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont, and, being taken with the cramp, was drowned: and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was—Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies: men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.”

The reader will bear in mind that Rosalind is disguised as a youth in man's attire. This is a very favourite device of Shakespeare's. It has its advantages, as it helps him out of many difficulties, and gives rise to many humorous and pleasing situations. In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Julia is disguised as a man; Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*; Imogen in *Cymbeline*; Viola in *Twelfth Night*, and so on.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* we find a boy dressed up as a girl, for the purpose of making game of the French doctor, Caius.

By the aid of this device, Phebe the shepherdess, falls in love with Rosalind, imagining her to be a man. She is disdainful of her humble suitor Silvius, and wishes to throw him over on Rosalind's account.

Rosalind gives Phebe a very wholesome lecture for her pains, and exhausts on her all her wit, satire, and disdain:—

“ Ros. [*coming forward*] And why, I pray you? Who might be your mother,  
That you insult, exult, and all at once,  
Over the wretched? What though you have some beauty,—  
As, by my faith, I see no more in you  
Than without candle may go dark to bed,—  
Must you be therefore proud and pitiless?  
Why, what means this? Why do you look on me?  
I see no more in you than in the ordinary  
Of nature's sale-work:—'Od's my little life,  
I think she means to tangle my eyes too!—  
No, faith, proud mistress, hope not after it:

'Tis not your inky brows, your black-silk hair,  
 Your bugle eyeballs, nor your cheek of cream,  
 That can entame my spirits to your worship.—  
 You foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow her,  
 Like foggy south, puffing with wind and rain ?  
 You are a thousand times a properer man  
 Than she a woman : 'tis such fools as you  
 That makes the world full of ill-favour'd children :  
 'Tis not her glass, but you, that flatters her ;  
 And out of you she sees herself more proper  
 Than any of her lineaments can show her.—  
 But, mistress, know yourself : down on your knees,  
 And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love :  
 For I must tell you friendly in your ear,—  
 Sell when you can : you are not for all markets :  
 Cry the man mercy ; love him ; take his offer :  
 Foul is most foul, being foul to be a scoffer.—  
 So, take her to thee, shepherd :—fare you well."

Shakespeare, as in the above passage, very frequently makes use in this play of the phrase "proper man." He does not confine it to the girls of the lower-orders, but puts into the mouth of a lady like Rosalind.

In these days no lady would make use of the expression, but servant girls very frequently do. One often hears them say, "that is a proper man," meaning thereby, "that is something like a man," or "a man as he should be."

There is another emphatic phrase in the play which he twice makes use of: "Chestnut is your only colour," "Motley's your only wear."

Shakespeare winds up the piece with considerable ingenuity. He turns all the bad people at the commencement of the piece into good people at the end, for without this little device it would have been almost impossible to have brought it to a conclusion, or to have made a satisfactory settlement of the parties. So this is what he very dexterously does, and by means of this in the person of the reformed Oliver, the wicked brother of Orlando, he provides a suitable mate, in position at any rate for poor Celia,

who otherwise would have been left out in the cold.

One cannot help feeling that Celia was worthy of a better fate, for in good sense and devotion, if not in brilliancy, she was quite the equal of her cousin Rosalind.

However, like other young ladies in this world, she had to content herself with what the gods chose to bestow.

The play abounds in many pretty and beautiful sonnets, or lyrical pieces, two of the best known of which are the following. They are well known, but can never be too well known, so here they are—

## SONG.

“ *Ami.*        *Blow, blow, thou winter wind,  
                  Thou art not so unkind  
                  As man's ingratitude ;  
                  Thy tooth is not so keen,  
                  Because thou art not seen,  
                  Although thy breath be rude.  
Heigh-ho ! sing, heigh-ho ! unto the green holly :  
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly :  
                  Then, heigh-ho, the holly !  
                  This life is most jolly.*

*Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,  
That dost not bite so nigh  
                  As benefits forgot :  
Though thou the waters warp,  
Thy sting is not so sharp  
                  As friend remember'd not.”*

## SONG.

“ *What shall he have that kill'd the deer ?  
His leather skin, and horns to wear.  
Take thou no scorn to wear the horn :  
It was a crest ere thou wast born ;  
                  Thy father's father wore it,  
                  And thy father bore it :  
The horn, the horn, the lusty horn,  
Is not a thing to laugh to scorn.”*

As we pass from *As You Like It* to *Midsummer Night's Dream*, we pass from the land of fancy into

the very region of fairyland itself. There are no fairies like Shakespeare's fairies; dear little volatile, prankish, mischievous, now visible, and now invisible imps, dancing tip-toe at all hours of the day and night, midway, as it were, between earth and heaven.

There is no play quite like this play, unique both in quality and design.

The great enchanter with his wand seems to convert at a stroke the English tongue, which at the first blush seems somewhat unyielding, uncouth, and ill-suited for the purpose, into the ready instrument of his will, and utilises it as a surprisingly delicate medium for the language of the fairies.

Shakespeare's genius is as potent to make words the expression of thoughts, sights, and sounds, and even of his own subtle and delicate sensibilities, as ever was the mysterious narcotic love-juice of Puck to hypnotise the sleeping eye-lids of a Titania, a Lysander, or a Demetrius, and to direct their affections into the channel he desires.

It is amazing! Perhaps nowhere does Shakespeare's genius display itself with greater lustre and brilliancy.

Who could imagine that the possessor of the brain-power and of the matter-of-fact observation and perception necessary for the proper delineation of the historical drama, or the intense and deep passion of the soul without which the proper portrayal of great tragedy is impossible, could in an instant transfer and transport itself into another realm, and extract, as it were, with the same instrument, the delicate, volatile, and exquisite music of the spirits of the air in the land of fantasy and dreams?

It is as if some great genius—some Michelangelo—of architecture and design, should suddenly step down from the heights of his great imaginings, take himself



the craftsman's chisel in his hand, and then and there work out the hidden complications and recesses of some delicate and elaborate piece of masonry.

Or to change the metaphor; it is as if some great painter in oils, accustomed to express in the human face all the feeling and master-passions that deface or adorn it, should take his easel and his brush, and then and there decipher and illuminate in water-colours, some intricate and enchanting piece of natural scenery.

The play is, moreover, remarkable in its structure; a marvel of composition and compression.

The structure, composition, and what are known as the "unities" of the piece, are almost perfect, and the most devoted admirer of Shakespeare could hardly assert this of them all. In many of his plays the unities are disregarded altogether, in some the endings are hurried and imperfect, in others again the sequence is at times disjointed, and the characters but loosely strung together, and wanting in symmetry and finish.

But none of these defects are apparent in *Midsummer Night's Dream*; and this is the more remarkable, as at first sight one would think it a difficult play to blend.

There are in it three distinct classes of people; the Duke and his courtiers, the artificers and workers, who designed and acted the wedding play, and the fairies themselves. Yet they are all worked out and fitted in very deftly together; they are none of them superfluous or out of place, but they unite and work harmoniously among themselves to make the piece what it is.

The most charming and unique creation of them all, the most dainty efflorescence of Shakespeare's imagination, is that now visible, now invisible, merry wanderer of the night, the immortal Puck or Robin-



Goodfellow. He is a sweet little imp of darkness and light, of mischief and good-nature. There is no fairy in all literature that can compete with Puck, or can precisely take his place.

Ariel in *The Tempest*, somewhat resembles him, but Ariel is a more serious creation ; his powers are greater, he is the spirit of the air, and has power over the waves, the weather, and the wind.

Little Puck, though possessed of many weird and unearthly attributes, is not quite equal to that. But he can do what is perhaps more important to mortal men—he can, with his love-juice, keep lovers constant, and bring them back to their allegiance. He is a busy little sprite, can be in two places at once ; light and darkness, day and night, are alike to him, and when there is mischief afoot all his little person quivers with delight.

“Puck,” or “Pouke,” meant originally the “devil.” It is used in that sense in “Piers’ Ploughman’s Vision.”

It was necessary for Shakespeare’s fairy messenger to assert his honesty, and to deny all connection with the “hell Pouke.” He says, “I am an honest Pouke,” and so he is. There is nothing devilish about the little creature ; his actions are beneficent and not malignant, but in mischief he delights. He says:—

“Those things do best please me  
That befall preposterously.”

He loved to lead, and mislead:—

“Up and down, up and down,  
I will lead them up and down.”

He had great powers of locomotion:—

“*Puck.* I go, I go, look how I go  
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar’s bow.”

"*Puck*. I will put a girdle round about the earth  
In forty minutes."

His mischief-making propensities are witnessed to  
by another fairy, and acknowledged by himself:—

"*Fai*. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,  
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite  
Call'd Robin Goodfellow : are you not he  
That frights the maidens of the villagery ;  
Skims milk, and sometime labours in the quern,  
And bootless makes the breathless housewife churn ;  
And sometime makes the drink to bear no barm ;  
Misleads night-wanderers, laughing at their harm ?  
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,  
You do their work, and they shall have good luck :—  
Are not you he ?

*Puck*. Fairy, thou speak'st aright ;  
I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal :  
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,  
In very likeness of a roasted crab ;  
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,  
And on her wither'd dewlap pour the ale.  
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,  
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me ;  
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,  
And ' tailor ' cries, and falls into a cough ;  
And then the whole quire hold their hips and loff,  
And waxen in their mirth, and sneeze, and swear  
A merrier hour was never wasted there.—  
But room now, fairy ! here comes Oberon."

But the little rascal did the girls, Hermia and Helena,  
a good turn, for he secured to them their respective  
lovers.

Puck winds up the piece with what is called a  
Bergo-mask, or Merry Andrew :—

"*Puck*. Now the hungry lion roars,  
And the wolf behowls the moon ;  
Whilst the heavy ploughman snores,  
All with weary task fordone.  
Now the wasted brands do glow,  
Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,  
Puts the wretch that lies in woe  
In remembrance of a shroud.

Now it is the time of night,  
 That the graves, all gaping wide,  
 Every one lets forth his sprite,  
 In the church-way paths to glide :  
 And we fairies, that do run  
 By the triple Hecate's team  
 From the presence of the sun,  
 Following darkness like a dream,  
 Now are frolic : not a mouse  
 Shall disturb this hallow'd house :  
 I am sent, with broom, before,  
 To sweep the dust behind the door."

Shakespeare's fairies are unique in their way, and belong to a different order of being to the Genii, the Naiads, and Salamanders of the ancient world on the one hand, and the dispossessed spirits which once possessed human bodies of Dryden on the other. Says Dryden:—

" All those airy shapes you now behold  
 Were human bodies once and clothed with mould.  
 Our souls not yet prepared for upper light  
 Till Domesday wander in the shades of night."

They more nearly resemble the French and German "Fees," being fond of pranks and generally pleasing.

Students of Shakespeare will remember that it is Oberon, the fairy king, who gives Puck the receipt for his love potion. Titania, the queen of the fairies, had adopted a child from an Indian princess which she greatly prized, and Oberon coveted its possession, as a valuable recruit to his train-bearers. He can only make Titania yield to his wishes by the love charm which he directs Puck to apply:—

" *Obe.* That very time I saw—but thou couldst not—  
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth,  
 Cupid all arm'd : a certain aim he took  
 At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,  
 And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,  
 As it should pierce a hundred-thousand hearts :  
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft  
 Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,

And the imperial votaress passèd on,  
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free.  
 Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell :  
 It fell upon a little western flower,  
 Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,  
 And maidens call it love-in-idleness.  
 Fetch me that flower ; the herb I show'd thee once :  
 The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid  
 Will make or man or woman madly dote  
 Upon the next live creature that it sees.  
 Fetch me this herb ; and be thou here again  
 Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

*Puck.* I'll put a girdle round about the earth  
 In forty minutes.

*Obe.* Having once this juice,  
 I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,  
 And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.  
 The next thing then she waking looks upon,—  
 Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,  
 On meddling monkey or on busy ape,—  
 She shall pursue it with the soul of love :  
 And ere I take this charm off from her sight,—  
 As I can take it with another herb,—  
 I'll make her render up her page to me.  
 But who comes here ? I am invisible ;  
 And I will overhear their conference."

Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Titania one very remarkable speech. It is supposed to have reference to the state of the weather in England at the time. That the weather in England in 1594 was exceptional and very bad is known by an extract from a journal kept by a certain gentleman at the time and quoted by Collier.

Shakespeare is supposed to have written *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the close of 1594 or the beginning of the year 1595.

No expert agriculturist could have produced a truer picture of the effects of weather on the land :—

" *Tita.* These are the forgeries of jealousy :  
 And never, since the middle summer's spring,  
 Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,  
 By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,  
 Or on the beached margent of the sea,  
 To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,

But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.  
 Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
 As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea  
 Contagious fogs ; which falling in the land,  
 Have every pelting river made so proud,  
 That they have over-borne their continents :  
 The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain.  
 The ploughman lost his sweat ; and the green corn  
 Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard :  
 The fold stands empty in the drownèd field,  
 And crows are fatted with the murrain flock ;  
 The nine-men's-morris is fill'd up with mud ;  
 And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,  
 For lack of tread, are undistinguishable :  
 The human mortals want their winter cheer ;  
 No night is now with hymn or carol blest :—  
 Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
 Pale in her anger, washes all the air,  
 That rheumatic diseases do abound :  
 And thorough this distemperature we see  
 The seasons alter : hoary-headed frosts  
 Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose ;  
 And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
 An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds  
 Is, as in mockery, set : the spring, the summer,  
 The childing autumn, angry winter, change  
 Their wonted liveries ; and the mazèd world,  
 From their increase, now knows not which is which."

We must here bid farewell to the fairies, and turn to the other characters in the piece: the court people and their love troubles. Lysander is in love with Hermia; Demetrius is his rival and in love with her, too. Helena, the friend of Hermia, is in love with Demetrius. How to make Demetrius in love with Helena is the puzzle; and Oberon and Puck, between them effect a solution.

Shakespeare, here as elsewhere, is very fond of the double or duplicate. In his plays there are usually two pairs of lovers, and not infrequently one play within another. He is fond of the couplet in verse, and frequently employs it. This affection for duality doubtless arises from the duality of his own nature.

In a play like this, where all is so good, it is difficult

to make selections. There is an *embarras de richesse*. Every line equals every other line in point and dexterity; every speech seems to rival and surpass the speech that immediately precedes it, and the whole seems hardly able to contain itself from the very excellence of its contents.

But what can equal for charm the sad love sighs of a Helena. The plaintive and restless note of an impotent jealousy and a hopeless affection were surely never more sweetly warbled than by the fair Helena herself:—

“ *Hel.* Call you me fair ? that fair again unsay.  
Demetrius loves your fair : O happy fair !  
Your eyes are lode-stars ; and your tongue’s sweet air  
More tuneable than lark to shepherd’s ear,  
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.  
Sickness is catching : O, were favour so,  
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia ! ere I go,  
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,  
My tongue should catch your tongue’s sweet melody.  
Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,  
The rest I’ll give to be to you translated.  
O, teach me how you look ; and with what art  
You sway the motion of Demetrius’ heart.

· *Hel.* · How happy some o’er other-some can be !  
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.  
But what of that ? Demetrius thinks not so ;  
He will not know what all but he do know :  
And as he errs, doting on Hermia’s eyes,  
So I, admiring of his qualities.  
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity :  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind ;  
And therefore is wing’d Cupid painted blind :  
Nor hath love’s mind of any judgment taste ;  
Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste :  
And therefore is Love said to be a child,  
Because in choice he is so oft beguil’d.  
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,  
So the boy Love is perjur’d every where :  
For ere Demetrius look’d on Hermia’s cyne,  
He hail’d down oaths that he was only mine ;  
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,  
So he dissolv’d, and showers of oaths did melt.

I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight :  
 Then to the wood will lie to-morrow night  
 Pursue her ; and for this intelligence  
 If I have thanks, it is a dear expense :  
 But herein mean I to enrich my pain,  
 To have his sight thither and back again."

Shakespeare puts one very remarkable speech into the mouth of Theseus the duke :—

" *The.* More strange than true : I never may believe  
 These antique fables nor these fairy toys.  
 Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
 The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact :—  
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,—  
 That is, the madman : the lover, all as frantic,  
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt :  
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven ;  
 And, as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation and a name."

There is one other celebrity in this play, who cannot be overlooked, the famous Nick Bottom, the leader of the artificers, or "hempen home-spuns," as Puck derisively calls them. Nick Bottom is an entertaining oddity, something out of the common, one of those characters which are peculiarly Shakespeare's own, and which he is fond of creating. Bottom can be humorous, that may be conceded, without going so far as Professor Dowden, who tells us that he is an incomparably finer efflorescence of the absurd than any preceding character of Shakespeare's invention. The "hempen home-spuns" say of him :—

"He hath simply the best wit of any handicraft man in Athens.

Yea, and the best person too ; and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice."



But that is only the "hempen home-spuns'" opinion. He is one of those characters, fond of diversion, and clever in petty contrivances. His wit is of the ingenious order and extracted by a variety of situations.

He is the very memorable utterer of the phrase :—

" I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove."

His chief humour he tells us, was for a tyrant :—

" I could play Eracles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.

The raging rocks  
And shivering shocks  
Shall break the locks  
Of prison gates :  
And Phibbus' car  
Shall shine from far  
And make and mar  
The foolish Fates."

He had a wonderful dream, which he called Bottom's dream, because it had no bottom.

Let us take leave of this beautiful play, with but one more quotation from Oberon the king of the fairies himself :—

" *Obe.* I pray thee, give it me.  
I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,  
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows ;  
Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine :  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,  
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight ;  
And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin,  
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in :  
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,  
And make her full of hateful fantasies.  
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove :  
A sweet Athenian lady is in love  
With a disdainful youth : anoint his eyes ;  
But do it when the next thing he espies  
May be the lady : thou shalt know the man  
By the Athenian garments he hath on."

Verily the play is of imagination all compact, and Shakespeare has acted up to his own prescription, and given to "airy nothings" a local habitation and a name.

## CHAPTER XI

### SELECTIONS

IT is proposed to devote this chapter entirely to selections—soliloquies, and speeches, interspersed with song—all of them, doubtless, are well known to some, and some well known to all. Those who are unacquainted with them, or have never read them at all, may have their attention arrested by their power and beauty, or by whatever quality for which they are conspicuous, and those who but dimly recognise them through the vista of the years may refresh their memories and possibly their hearts, with the renewal of old, but never-to-be-forgotten acquaintances.

The majority of them speak for themselves, the remainder will be set down with but the barest and most necessary comment. They are selected with some care, and in about equal proportions from Comedies, Tragedies, and Histories alike.

From *Measure for Measure*, Act ii., Scene 2 :—

“ *Isab.* So you must be the first that gives this sentence ;  
And he that suffers. O ! It is excellent  
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous  
To use it like a giant.  
Could great men thunder  
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet ;  
For every petting, petty officer  
Would use his heaven for thunder,—  
Nothing but thunder. Merciful heaven !  
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt

Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak  
 Than the soft myrtle, but man, proud man !  
 Drest in a little brief authority—  
 Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd  
 His glassy essence—like an angry ape,  
 Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
 As make the angels weep, who with our spleens,  
 Would all themselves laugh mortal."

From *Measure for Measure*, Act iii., Scene i. The Duke of Venice on the relative value of life and death:—

" *Duke*. Be absolute for death ; either death or life  
 Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life :—  
 If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing  
 That none but fools would keep : a breath thou art,—  
 Servile to all the skyey influences,—  
 That dost this habitation, where thou keep'st,  
 Hourly afflict : merely, thou art death's fool ;  
 For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,  
 And yet run'st toward him still. Thou art not noble :  
 For all th' accommodations that thou bear'st  
 Are nurs'd by baseness. Thou art by no means valiant ;  
 For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork  
 Of a poor worm. Thy best of rest is sleep,  
 And that thou oft provok'st ; yet grossly fear'st  
 Thy death, which is no more. Thou art not thyself ;  
 For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains  
 That issue out of dust. Happy thou art not ;  
 For what thou hast not, still thou striv'st to get,  
 And what thou hast, forget'st. Thou art not certain ;  
 For thy complexion shifts to strange effects,  
 After the moon. If thou art rich, thou'rt poor ;  
 For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,  
 Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,  
 And death unloads thee. Friend hast thou none ;  
 For thine own bowels, which do call thee sire,  
 The mere effusion of thy proper loins,  
 Do curse the gout, serpigo, and the rheum,  
 For ending thee no sooner. Thou hast nor youth nor age ;  
 But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,  
 Dreaming on both ; for all thy blessed youth  
 Becomes as aged, and doth beg the alms  
 Of palsied eld : and when thou art old and rich,  
 Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty,  
 To make thy riches pleasant. What's yet in this  
 That bears the name of life ? Yet in this life  
 Lie hid more thousand deaths : yet death we fear,  
 That makes these odds all even."



*It is engender'd in the eyes,  
With gazing fed ; and fancy dies  
In the cradle where it lies.*

*Let us all ring fancy's knell ;  
I'll begin it,—Ding, dong, bell.*

*All. Ding, dong, bell.*

*Bass.* So may the outward shows be least themselves :  
The world is still deceiv'd with ornament.  
In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt,  
But, being season'd with a gracious voice,  
Obscures the show of evil ? In religion,  
What damnèd error, but some sober brow  
Will bless it, and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament ?  
There is no vice so simple, but assumes  
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts :  
How many cowards, whose hearts are all as false  
As stairs of sand, wear yet upon their chins  
The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars ;  
Who, inward search'd, have livers white as milk ;  
And these assume but valour's excrement  
To render them redoubted ! Look on beauty,  
And you shall see 'tis purchas'd by the weight ;  
Which therein works a miracle in nature,  
Making them lightest that wear most of it :  
So are those crispèd snaky golden locks,  
Which make such wanton gambols with the wind,  
Upon supposed fairness, often known  
To be the dowry of a second head,  
The skull that bred them in the sepulchre.  
Thus ornament is but the guilèd shore  
To a most dangerous sea ; the beauteous scarf  
Veiling an Indian beauty ; in a word,  
The seeming truth which cunning times put on  
T' entrap the wisest. Therefore, thou gaudy gold,  
Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee ;  
Nor none of thee, thou stale and common drudge  
'Tween man and man : but thou, thou meagre lead,  
Which rather threatenest than dost promise aught,  
Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence ;  
And here choose I :—joy be the consequence ! ”

The following is Portia's celebrated discourse on  
“ Mercy ” :—

“ *Por.* The quality of mercy is not strain'd,—  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath : it is twice bless'd,—  
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes :  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest : it becomes  
The thronèd monarch better than his crown ;

His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
 The attribute to awe and majesty,  
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings ;  
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway,—  
 It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,  
 It is an attribute to God himself ;  
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,  
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this,—  
 That, in the course of justice, none of us  
 Should see salvation : we do pray for mercy ;  
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
 The deeds of mercy."

From *Romeo and Juliet*, Act ii., Scene 2 :—

" *Enter* ROMEO.

*Rom.* He jests at scars that never felt a wound.—

[*Juliet appears above at a window.*

But, soft ! what light through yonder window breaks ?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun !—

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou her maid art far more fair than she :

Be not her maid, since she is envious ;

Her vestal livery is but pale and green,

And none but fools do wear it ; cast it off.—

It is my lady ; O, it is my love !

O, that she knew she were !—

She speaks, yet she says nothing : what of that ?

Her eye discourses ; I will answer it.—

I am too bold ; 'tis not to me she speaks :

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,

Having some business, do entreat her eyes

To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

What if her eyes were there, they in her head ?

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,

As daylight doth a lamp ; her eyes in heaven

Would through the airy region stream so bright,

That birds would sing, and think it were not right.—

See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand !

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek !"

From the same, Act iii., Scene 5 :—

" *Jul.* Wilt thou be gone ? it is not yet near day :

It was the nightingale, and not the lark,

That pierc'd the fearful hollow of thine ear ;

Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree :

Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

*Rom.* It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
No nightingale : look, love, what envious streaks  
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east :  
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.  
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

*Jul.* Yon light is not day-light, I know it, I :  
It is some meteor that the sun exhales,  
To be to thee this night a torch-bearer,  
And light thee on thy way to Mantua :  
Therefore stay yet,—thou need'st not to be gone.

*Rom.* Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death ;  
I am content, so thou wilt have it so.  
I'll say yon gray is not the morning's eye,  
'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow ;  
Nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat  
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads :  
I have more care to stay than will to go :—  
Come, death, and welcome ! Juliet wills it so.—  
How is't, my soul ? let's talk,—it is not day.

*Jul.* It is, it is,—hie hence, be gone, away !  
It is the lark that sings so out of tune,  
Straining harsh discords and unpleasing sharps.  
Some say the lark makes sweet division ;  
This doth not so, for she divideth us :  
Some say the lark and loathèd toad chang'd eyes ;  
O, now I would they had chang'd voices too !  
Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray,  
Hunting thee hence with hunt's-up to the day.  
O, now be gone ; more light and light it grows.

*Rom.* More light and light,—more dark and dark our woes ! ”

From *King John*, Act ii., Scene 2. The bastard  
son of Faulconbridge on “Commodity” :—

“ That smooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling commodity,—  
Commodity, the bias of the world ;  
The world, who of itself is peizèd well,  
Made to run even upon even ground ;  
Till this advantage, this vile drawing bias,  
This sway of motion, this commodity,  
Makes it take head from all indifferency,  
From all direction, purpose, course, intent :  
And this same bias, this commodity,  
This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,  
Clapp'd on the outward eye of fickle France,  
Hath drawn him from his own determin'd aid,  
From a resolv'd and honourable war,  
To a most base and vile-concluded peace.—  
And why rail I on this commodity ?



But for because he hath not woo'd me yet :  
 Not that I have the power to clutch my hand,  
 When his fair angels would salute my palm ;  
 But for my hand, as unattempted yet,  
 Like a poor beggar, raileth on the rich.  
 Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail,  
 And say,—There is no sin, but to be rich ;  
 And being rich, my virtue then shall be,  
 To say,—There is no vice, but beggary :  
 Since kings break faith upon commodity,  
 Gain, be my lord ; for I will worship thee !

[*Exit.*"]

From *Richard II.*, Act i., Scene 3:—

"*Boling.* O, who can hold a fire in his hand  
 By thinking on the frosty Caucasus ?  
 Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite  
 By bare imagination of a feast ?  
 Or wallow naked in December snow  
 By thinking on fantastic summer's heat ?  
 O, no ! the apprehension of the good  
 Gives but the greater feeling to the worse :  
 Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more  
 Than when it bites, but lanceth not the sore."

From *Richard II.*, Act iii., Scene 2, on the frailty  
 of the kingly office and the woes attendant thereon:—

"*K. Rich.* No matter where ;—of comfort no man speak :  
 Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs ;  
 Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes  
 Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.  
 Let's choose executors, and talk of wills :  
 And yet not so,—for what can we bequeath,  
 Save our deposèd bodies to the ground ?  
 Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's,  
 And nothing can we call our own but death,  
 And that small model of the barren earth  
 Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.  
 For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,  
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings :—  
 How some have been depos'd ; some slain in war ;  
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd ;  
 Some poison'd by their wives ; some sleeping kill'd ;  
 All murder'd :—for within the hollow crown  
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
 Keeps Death his court ; and there the antic sits,  
 Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp ;  
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene,  
 To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks ;

Infusing him with self and vain conceit,—  
 As if this flesh, which walls about our life,  
 Were brass impregnable ; and humour'd thus,  
 Comes at the last, and with a little pin  
 Bores through his castle-wall, and—farewell king !  
 Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood  
 With solemn reverence ; throw away respect,  
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty ;  
 For you have but mistook me all this while :  
 I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief,  
 Need friends :—subjected thus,  
 How can you say to me, I am a king ? ”

From *Henry IV.*, Part II, Act iii., Scene i. King  
 Henry's eulogy on “ Sleep ” :—

“ O sleep, O gentle sleep,  
 Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,  
 That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,  
 And steep my senses in forgetfulness ?  
 Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,  
 Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,  
 And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber  
 Than in the perfum'd chambers of the great,  
 Under the canopies of costly state,  
 And lull'd with sounds of sweetest melody ?  
 O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile  
 In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch  
 A watch-case or a common 'larum-bell ?  
 Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
 Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains  
 In cradle of the rude imperious surge,  
 And in the visitation of the winds,  
 Who take the ruffian billows by the top,  
 Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them  
 With deafening clamour in the slippery shrouds,  
 That, with the hurly, death itself awakes ?—  
 Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose  
 To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude ;  
 And in the calmest and most stillest night,  
 With all appliances and means to boot,  
 Deny it to a king ? Then, happy low, lie down !  
 Uncasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

From the same, Act iv., Scene 2. Prince John's  
 admonition to a fighting Archbishop :—

“ *P. John.* You're well encounter'd here, my cousin Mow-  
 bray :—  
 Good day to you, gentle lord archbishop ;—  
 And so to you, Lord Hastings,—and to all.—

My Lord of York, it better show'd with you,  
 When that your flock, assembled by the bell,  
 Encircled you to hear with reverence  
 Your exposition on the holy text,  
 Than now to see you here an iron man,  
 Cheering a rout of rebels with your drum,  
 Turning the word to sword, and life to death.  
 That man that sits within a monarch's heart,  
 And ripens in the sunshine of his favour,  
 Would he abuse the countenance of the king,  
 Alack, what mischiefs might he set abroad,  
 In shadow of such greatness ! With you, lord bishop,  
 It is even so. Who hath not heard it spoken,  
 How deep you were within the books of God ?  
 To us the speaker in his parliament ;  
 To us th' imagin'd voice of God himself ;  
 The very opener and intelligencer  
 Between the grace, the sanctities of heaven  
 And our dull workings. O, who shall believe,  
 But you misuse the reverence of your place,  
 Employ the countenance and grace of heaven,  
 As a false favourite doth his prince's name,  
 In deeds dishonourable ? You have ta'en up,  
 Under the counterfeited seal of God,  
 The subjects of his substitute, my father,  
 And both against the peace of heaven and him  
 Have here up-swarm'd them."

From *Henry V.*, Act iii., Scene i. A fighting speech :—

" *K. Hen.* Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more ;  
 Or close the wall up with our English dead !  
 In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
 As modest stillness and humility :  
 But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
 Then imitate the action of the tiger ;  
 Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
 Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage :  
 Then lend the eye a terrible aspect ;  
 Let it pry through the portage of the head  
 Like the brass cannon ; let the brow o'erwhelm it  
 As fearfully as doth a gallèd rock  
 O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
 Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.  
 Now set the teeth, and stretch the nostril wide ;  
 Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit  
 To his full height !—On, on, you noble English,  
 Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof !—

Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,  
 Have in these parts from morn till even fought,  
 And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument :—  
 Dishonour not your mothers ; now attest  
 That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you !  
 Be copy now to men of grosser blood,  
 And teach them how to war !—And you, good yeomen,  
 Whose limbs were made in England, show us here  
 The mettle of your pasture ; let us swear  
 That you are worth your breeding : which I doubt not,  
 For there is none of you so mean and base,  
 That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.  
 I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
 Straining upon the start. The game's afoot :  
 Follow your spirit ; and, upon this charge,  
 Cry ' God for Harry, England, and Saint George ! ' "

From the same, Act iv., Scene i. King Henry's lamentation over the woes and cares of the kingly office, a theme of which Shakespeare is particularly fond :—

" Upon the king !—let us our lives, our souls,  
 Our debts, our careful wives,  
 Our children, and our sins, lay on the king !  
 We must bear all. O hard condition,  
 Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath  
 Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel  
 But his own wringing !  
 What infinite heart's-ease must kings neglect,  
 That private men enjoy !  
 And what have kings, that privates have not too,  
 Save ceremony,—save general ceremony ?  
 And what art thou, thou idol ceremony ?  
 What kind of god art thou, that suffer'st more  
 Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers ?  
 What are thy rents ? what are thy comings-in ?  
 O ceremony, show me but thy worth !  
 What is thy soul, O adoration ?  
 Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form,  
 Creating awe and fear in other men ?  
 Wherein thou art less happy being fear'd  
 Than they in fearing.  
 What drink'st thou oft, instead of homage sweet,  
 But poison'd flattery ? O, be sick, great greatness,  
 And bid thy ceremony give thee cure !  
 Think'st thou the fiery fever will go out  
 With titles blown from adulation ?  
 Will it give place to flexure and low bending ?  
 Canst thou when thou command'st the beggar's knee,

Command the health of it ? No, thou proud dream,  
 That play'st so subtly with a king's repose :  
 I am a king that find thee ; and I know  
 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,  
 The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,  
 The intertissu'd robe of gold and pearl,  
 The farcèd title running 'fore the king,  
 The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp  
 That beats upon the high shore of this world,—  
 No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,  
 Not all these, laid in bed majestical,  
 Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,  
 Who, with a body fill'd and vacant mind,  
 Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread ;  
 Never sees horrid night, the child of hell ;  
 But, like a lackey, from the rise to set,  
 Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night  
 Sleeps in Elysium ; next day, after dawn,  
 Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse ;  
 And follows so the ever-running year,  
 With profitable labour, to his grace,  
 And but for ceremony, such a wretch  
 Winding up days with toil, and nights with sleep,  
 Had the fore-hand and vantage of a king,  
 The slave, a member of the country's peace,  
 Enjoys it ; but in gross brain little wots  
 What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace,  
 Whose hours the peasant best advantages."

From *Henry VI.*, Part III., Act ii., Scene 5. A  
 peace-loving king craves for a shepherd's life:—

" *K. Hen.* This battle fares like to the morning's war,  
 When dying clouds contend with growing light,  
 What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,  
 Can neither call it perfect day nor night.  
 Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea  
 Forc'd by the tide to combat with the wind ;  
 Now sways it that way, like the selfsame sea  
 Forc'd to retire by fury of the wind :  
 Sometime the flood prevails, and then the wind ;  
 Now one the better, then another best ;  
 Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,  
 Yet neither conqueror nor conquerèd :  
 So is the equal poise of this fell war.  
 Here on this molehill will I sit me down.  
 To whom God will, there be the victory !  
 For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,  
 Have chid me from the battle ; swearing both  
 They prosper best of all when I am thence.

Would I were dead ! if God's good will were so ;  
For what is in this world but grief and woe ?  
O God ! methinks it were a happy life,  
To be no better than a homely swain ;  
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,  
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,  
Thereby to see the minutes how they run,—  
How many make the hour full complete ;  
How many hours bring about the day ;  
How many days will finish up the year ;  
How many years a mortal man may live.  
When this is known, then to divide the times,—  
So many hours must I tend my flock ;  
So many hours must I take my rest ;  
So many hours must I cóntemplate ;  
So many hours must I sport myself ;  
So many days my ewes have been with young ;  
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yeau ;  
So many months ere I shall shear the fleece :  
So minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years,  
Pass'd over to the end they were created."

From *Henry VIII.*, Act iii., Scene 2.    Wolsey's  
farewell to his greatness :—

" *Wol.* So farewell to the little good you bear me.  
Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness !  
This is the state of man : to-day he puts forth  
The tender leaves of hope ; to-morrow blossoms,  
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him ;  
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,  
And—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely  
His greatness is a-ripening—nips his root,  
And then he falls, as I do. I have ventur'd,  
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,  
This many summers in a sea of glory ;  
But far beyond my depth : my high-blown pride  
At length broke under me ; and now has left me,  
Weary and old with service, to the mercy  
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.  
Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye :  
I feel my heart new open'd. O, how wretched  
Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours !  
There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,  
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,  
More pangs and fears than wars or women have ;  
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,  
Never to hope again."



The Cardinal out of love with ambition :—

“ *Wol.* Cromwell, I did not think to shed a tear  
In all my miseries ; but thou hast forc’d me,  
Out of thy honest truth, to play the woman.  
Let’s dry our eyes : and thus far hear me, Cromwell ;  
And—when I am forgotten, as I shall be,  
And sleep in dull cold marble, where no mention  
Of me more must be heard of—say, I taught thee,  
Say, Wolsey—that once trod the ways of glory,  
And sounded all the depths and shoals of honour—  
Found thee a way out of his wreck, to rise in ;  
A sure and safe one, though thy master miss’d it.  
Mark but my fall, and that that ruin’d me.  
Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition :  
By that sin fell the angels ; how can man, then,  
The image of his Maker, hope to win by’t ?  
Love thyself last ; cherish those hearts that hate thee ;  
Corruption wins not more than honesty.  
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,  
To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not :  
Let all the ends thou aim’st at be thy country’s,  
Thy God’s, and truth’s : then if thou fall’st, O Cromwell,  
Thou fall’st a blessèd martyr ! Serve the king ;  
And,—prithee, lead me in :  
There, take an inventory of all I have,  
To the last penny ; ’tis the king’s : my robe,  
And my integrity to heaven, is all  
I dare now call mine own. O Cromwell, Cromwell !  
Had I but serv’d my God with half the zeal  
I serv’d my king, he would not in mine age  
Have left me naked to mine enemies.”

From *Othello*, Act iii., Scene 3. A gentleman of  
colour in love :—

“ *Oth.* This fellow’s of exceeding honesty,  
And knows all qualities, with a learnèd spirit,  
Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,  
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings,  
I’d whistle her off, and let her down the wind,  
To prey at fortune. Haply, for I am black,  
And have not those soft parts of conversation  
That chamberers have ; or, for I am declin’d  
Into the vale of years,—yet that’s not much ;—  
She’s gone ; I am abus’d ; and my relief  
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,  
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,  
And not their appetites ! I had rather be a toad,  
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,



Than keep a corner in the thing I love  
 For others' uses. Yet, 'tis the plague of great ones ;  
 Prerogativ'd are they less than the base ;  
 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death :  
 Even then this forkèd plague is fated to us  
 When we do quicken.—Desdemona comes :  
 If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself !—  
 I'll not believe 't.

O, now, for ever

Farewell the tranquil mind ! farewell content !  
 Farewell the plumèd troop, and the big wars,  
 That make ambition virtue ! O, farewell !  
 Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,  
 The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,  
 The royal banner, and all quality,  
 Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war !  
 And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats  
 Th' immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit  
 Farewell ! Othello's occupation's gone ! ”

From the same. A very clever and unscrupulous  
 “ Ancient ” excites the suspicions and undermines  
 the affections of Othello :—

“ *Oth.* Excellent wretch ! Perdition catch my soul,  
 But I do love thee ! and when I love thee not,  
 Chaos is come again.

*Iago.* My noble lord,—

*Oth.* What dost thou say, Iago ?

*Iago.* Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,  
 Know of your love ?

*Oth.* He did, from first to last : why dost thou ask ?

*Iago.* But for a satisfaction of my thoughts ;  
 No further harm.

*Oth.* Why of thy thought, Iago ?

*Iago.* I did not think he had been acquainted with  
 her.

*Oth.* O, yes ; and went between us very oft.

*Iago.* Indeed !

*Oth.* Indeed ! ay, indeed :—discern'st thou aught in that ?  
 Is he not honest ?

*Iago.* Honest, my lord !

*Oth.* Honest ! ay, honest.

*Iago.* My lord, for aught I know.

*Oth.* What dost thou think ?

*Iago.* Think, my lord !

*Oth.* Think, my lord !

By heaven, he echoes me,  
 As if there were some monster in his thought  
 Too hideous to be shown.—Thou dost mean something :

I heard thee say even now, thou lik'dst not that,  
 When Cassio left my wife : what didst not like ?  
 And when I told thee he was of my counsel  
 In my whole course of wooing, thou criest ' Indeed !'  
 And didst contract and purse thy brow together,  
 As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain  
 Some horrible conceit : if thou dost love me,  
 Show me thy thought.

*Iago.* My lord, you know I love you.

*Oth.* I think thou dost ;

And, for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty,  
 And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath,  
 Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more :  
 For such things in a false disloyal knave  
 Are tricks of custom ; but in a man that's just  
 They're close delations, working from the heart,  
 That passion cannot rule.

*Iago.* For Michael Cassio,  
 I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.

*Oth.* I think so too.

*Iago.* Men should be what they seem ;  
 Or those that be not, would they might seem none !

*Oth.* Certain, men should be what they seem.

*Iago.* Why, then, I think Cassio's an honest man.

*Oth.* Nay, yet there's more in this :  
 I prithee, speak to me as to thy thinkings,  
 As thou dost ruminate ; and give thy worst of thoughts  
 The worst of words.

*Iago.* Good my lord, pardon me :  
 Though I am bound to every act of duty,  
 I am not bound to that all slaves are free to.  
 Utter my thoughts ? Why, say they're vile and false,—  
 As where's that palace whereinto foul things  
 Sometimes intrude not ? who has a breast so pure,  
 But some uncleanly apprehensions  
 Keep leets and law-days, and in session sit  
 With meditations lawful ?

*Oth.* Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,  
 If thou but think'st him wrong'd, and mak'st his ear  
 A stranger to thy thoughts.

*Iago.* I do beseech you—  
 Though I perchance am vicious in my guess,  
 As, I confess, it is my nature's plague  
 To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy  
 Shapes faults that are not—I entreat you then,  
 From one that so imperfectly conjects,  
 You'd take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble  
 Out of his scattering and unsure observance :  
 It were not for your quiet, nor your good,  
 Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom  
 To let you know my thoughts.

*Oth.* What dost thou mean ?

*Iago.* Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls ;  
Who steals my purse steals trash, 'tis something, nothing ;  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;  
But he who filches from me my good name,  
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed.

*Oth.* By heaven, I'll know thy thought.

*Iago.* You cannot, if my heart were in your hand ;  
Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.

*Oth.* Ha !

*Iago.* O, beware, my lord, of jealousy ;  
It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on ; That cuckold lives in bliss,  
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger ;  
But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er,  
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves !

*Oth.* O misery !

*Iago.* Poor and content is rich, and rich enough,  
But riches fineless is as poor as winter  
To him that ever fears she shall be poor :—  
Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend  
From jealousy ?

*Oth.* Why, why is this,  
Think'st thou, I'd make a life of jealousy,  
To follow still the changes of the moon  
With fresh suspicions ? No, to be once in doubt  
Is—once to be resolv'd : Exchange me for a goat,  
When I shall turn the business of my soul  
To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,  
Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous  
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,  
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well ;  
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous :  
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw  
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt ;  
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago ;  
I'll see before I doubt ; when I doubt, prove ;  
And, on the proof, there is no more but this,—  
Away at once with love or jealousy !

*Iago.* I'm glad of it ; for now I shall have reason  
To show the love and duty that I bear you  
With franker spirit : therefore, as I am bound,  
Receive it from me :—I speak not yet of proof.  
Look to your wife ; observe her well with Cassio ;  
Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure :  
I would not have your free and noble nature,  
Out of self-bounty, be abus'd ; look to't :  
I know our country disposition well ;  
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks

They dare not show their husbands ; their best conscience  
Is—not to leave undone, but keep unknown.

*Oth.* Dost thou say so ?

*Iago.* She did deceive her father, marrying you ;  
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,  
She lov'd them most.

*Oth.* And so she did.

*Iago.* Why, go to, then ;  
She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,  
To seal her father's eyes up close as oak—  
He thought 'twas witchcraft :—but I'm much to blame ;  
I humbly do beseech you of your pardon  
For too much loving you.

*Oth.* I'm bound to thee for ever.

*Iago.* I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits.

*Oth.* Not a jot, not a jot.

*Iago.* I' faith, I fear it has,  
I hope you will consider what is spoke  
Comes from my love ;—but I do see you're mov'd :—  
I am to pray you not to strain my speech  
To grosser issues nor to larger reach  
Than to suspicion.

*Oth.* I will not.

*Iago.* Should you do so, my lord,  
My speech should fall into such vile success  
As my thoughts aim not at. Cassio's my worthy friend :—  
My lord, I see you're mov'd.

*Oth.* No, not much mov'd :—  
I do not think but Desdemona's honest.

*Iago.* Long live she so ! and long live you to think so !

*Oth.* And yet, how nature erring from itself,—

*Iago.* Ay, there's the point :—as—to be bold with you—  
Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
Whereto we see in all things nature tends,—  
Foh ! one may smell in such a will most rank,  
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural :—  
But pardon me : I do not in position  
Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear  
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,  
May fall to match you with her country forms,  
And happily repent.

*Oth.* Farewell, farewell :  
If more thou dost perceive, let me know more ;  
Set on thy wife to observe : leave me, Iago.

*Iago.* My lord, I take my leave. [Going.]

*Oth.* Why did I marry ?—This honest creature doubtless  
Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.

*Iago.* My lord, I would I might entreat your honour  
[Returning.]  
To scan this thing no further ; leave it to time :  
Although 'tis fit that Cassio have his place,— "

The three following quotations are taken from *Troilus and Cressida*. It is well known that the adventures of Troilus and Cressida are not anywhere mentioned in the *Iliad*. Shakespeare does not seem to have drawn largely, if at all, on Chapman's translation of Homer, the earliest portion of which came out in the year 1598.

In this play the heroes of the *Iliad* are modernised but hardly improved upon. The play is certainly not one of Shakespeare's greatest successes. It is a difficult subject to handle, and as regards its structure and arrangement does not show Shakespeare at his best, but it is adorned with some very fine speeches, two of which we give below. Coleridge says of it :—

“ I am half inclined to believe that Shakespeare's main object, or shall I rather say, his ruling impulse, was to translate the poetic heroes of paganism into the not less rude, but more intellectually vigorous, and more featurely warriors of Christian chivalry — and to substantiate the distinct and graceful profiles or outlines of the Homeric epic into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama; in short, to give a grand history-piece in the robust style of Albert Dürer.”

The two following magnificent speeches of Ulysses are well known and frequently quoted. They are both long, but too good to be omitted.

From *Troilus and Cressida*, Act i., Scene 3. Ulysses on the necessity of obedience to, and gradation in authority:—

“ *Ulyss.* Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down,  
And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master,  
But for these instances.  
The speciality of rule hath been neglected :  
And, look, how many Grecian tents do stand  
Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.  
When that the general is not like the hive,  
To whom the foragers shall all repair,  
What honey is expected ? Degree being vizarded,  
Th' unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.  
The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,

Observe degree, priority, and place,  
 Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,  
 Office, and custom, in all line of order :  
 And therefore is the glorious planet Sol  
 In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd  
 Amidst the other ; whose med'cinable eye  
 Corrects the ill aspécts of planets evil,  
 And posts, like the commandment of a king,  
 Sans check, to good and bad : but when the plants,  
 In evil mixture, to disorder wander,  
 What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,  
 What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,  
 Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,  
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate  
 The unity and married calm of states  
 Quite from their fixture ! O, when degree is shak'd,  
 Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
 Then enterprise is sick ! How could communities,  
 Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,  
 Peaceful commérce from dividable shores,  
 The primogenity and due of birth,  
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,  
 But by degree, stand in authentic place ?  
 Take but degree away, untune that string,  
 And, hark, what discord follows ! each thing meets  
 In mere oppugnancy : the bounded waters  
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,  
 And make a sop of all this solid globe :  
 Strength should be lord of imbecility,  
 And the rude son should strike his father dead :  
 Force should be right ; or rather, right and wrong—  
 Between whose endless jar justice resides—  
 Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
 Then every thing includes itself in power,  
 Power into will, will into appetite ;  
 And appetite, an universal wolf,  
 So doubly seconded with will and power,  
 Must make perforce an universal prey,  
 And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,  
 This chaos, when degree is suffocate,  
 Follows the choking.  
 And this neglect of degree it is,  
 That by a pace goes backward, with a purpose  
 It hath to climb. The general's disdain'd  
 By him one step below't ; he, by the next ;  
 That next, by him beneath : so every step,  
 Exempl'd by the first pace that is sick  
 Of his superior, grows to an envious fever  
 Of pale and bloodless emulation :  
 And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,



Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,  
Troy in our weakness stands, not in her strength."

From *Troilus and Cressida*, Act iii., Scene 3 :—

" *Ulyss.* Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,  
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,  
A great-siz'd monster of ingratitudes :  
Those scraps are good deeds past ; which are devour'd  
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon  
As they are done : perséverance, dear my lord,  
Keeps honour bright : to have done, is to hang  
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail  
In monumental mockery. Take th' instant way ;  
For honour travels in a strait so narrow,  
Where one but goes abreast : keep, then, the path ;  
For emulation hath a thousand sons,  
That one by one pursue : if you give way,  
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,  
Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,  
And leave you hindmost ;  
Or, like a gallant horse fall'n in first rank,  
Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,  
O'er-run and trampled on : then what they do in present,  
Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours ;  
For time is like a fashionable host,  
That slightly shakes his parting guest by th' hand,  
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,  
Grasps-in the comer : welcome ever smiles,  
And farewell goes out sighing. O, let not virtue seek  
Remuneration for the thing it was ;  
For beauty, wit,  
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,  
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all  
To envious and calumniating time.  
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,—  
That all, with one consent, praise new-born gauds,  
Though they are made and moulded of things past,  
And give to dust, that is a little gilt,  
More laud than gilt o'er-dusted.  
The present eye praises the present object :  
Then marvel not, thou great and cômplete man,  
That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax ;  
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye  
Than what not stirs. The cry went once on thee,  
And still it might, and yet it may again,  
If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive,  
And case thy reputation in thy tent ;  
Whose glorious deeds, but in these fields of late,  
Made emulous missions 'mongst the gods themselves,  
And drave great Mar- to faction."



Troilus, anticipating the entrance of Cressida, exclaims :—

“ I am giddy : expectation whirls me round.  
Th' imaginary relish is so sweet  
That it enchants my sense ; what will it be  
When that the wat'ry palate tastes indeed  
Love's thrice-reputed nectar ? ”

On reaching the Roman plays, *Julius Cæsar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare stands on firmer historical ground than he does elsewhere, and this is accounted for by the fact that he derived nearly all his material from Plutarch, as translated by Sir Thomas North, and first published in 1579.

Before proceeding to reproduce the three celebrated speeches which appear below, and which Coleridge says are almost super-human in their power, it might not be out of place, and might be of advantage to the reader unacquainted with Roman history, to glance very briefly at the state of affairs at the time of Cæsar's assassination. It was a momentous time for Rome, and a turning-point in her history. The old Republican order of things was passing away, and Rome was about to assume the Imperial mantle, and the dominion of the world. Antony had already thrice offered Cæsar the crown which he had thrice refused.

Brutus, the stern old reactionary and Republican, saw what was coming, and was determined before too late, to stop it if he could. To remove Cæsar by assassination was he thought, the only possible and effectual method to pursue, and having once accepted the idea he was not the man to turn back.

Brutus is the great and moving personality in the well-known and historic scene so splendidly dramatised by Shakespeare ; he is apparently successful in his enterprise, and for the moment, but for the moment only, is master of the situation. He is a fine character and

represents the stern and unbending spirit of old Rome. An idealist, and ready to lay down his life at any moment for the idea by which he was obsessed.

So far from being a revolutionist he wanted to preserve Rome as she had been under the palmy and victorious days of the Republic. Like so many idealists he forgot that truth has many facets, and by keeping his gaze fixed steadily on one alone, he failed to realise that the world around him was moving rapidly, that a new world and a new order of things was coming into being, that the very extension of the Roman dominion made her inevitably more cosmopolitan, and that some day, sooner or later, her imperial spirit would find a visible embodiment in an Emperor of her choice.

Brutus, true to the old Roman tradition had an innate dread of kings, by whatever title they might be designated.

Cæsar represented one idea, and Brutus another, and Brutus like all fanatics, did not hesitate at assassination even of the greatest, when it obscured his vision of what he believed to be truth, or stood in the way of its realisation.

Professor Dowden calls him a Girondist, but Girondist is surely too modern and unworthy a word to designate so grand and massive a character.

Moreover, the word is inapplicable. A Girondist denotes a member of the right or more moderate wing of a revolutionary party. Brutus, so far from being a revolutionist, was if anything a reactionary. Like Varro before him, he did not despair of the Republic.

Brutus lived among books, nourished himself with philosophy, and forgot or ignored concrete realities. But he was shrewd enough to reject the advice of Cassius to admit Cicero into the conspiracy. Cicero, with his "ferret and his fiery eyes," was quite an

unreliable person, inordinately proud both of his learning and patrician birth:—

“ *Brutus*. O, name him not, let us not break with him ;  
For he will never follow anything  
That other men begin.”

The character of Cassius stands in complete contrast to that of Brutus ; he was bold, observant, and energetic. He is the chief conspirator against Cæsar. It is he who contrives and hatches the plot, and fans the fire that was already smouldering in the brain of Brutus. He uses Brutus as a tool. The moral elevation of Brutus was necessary to give sanction and authority to the crime, and Brutus by no means reluctant was secured. What form the Roman government might assume was probably to Cassius a matter of indifference ; his motives were his own ambition, hatred of Cæsar, and jealousy of his authority. The relationship of Cassius towards Brutus, and the feelings that Cassius entertained towards Cæsar, the following passages sufficiently reveal.

The reader of course must bear in mind, that the words put into the mouths of the conspirators are Shakespeare's words, but they fairly represent the thoughts and actions of the two men as they are represented by, and known to history:—

“ *Bru*. What means this shouting ? I do fear, the people  
Choose Cæsar for their king.

*Cass*. Ay, do you fear it ?  
Then must I think you would not have it so.

*Bru*. I would not, Cassius ; yet I love him well.—  
But wherefore do you hold me here so long ?

What is it that you would impart to me ?  
If it be aught toward the general good,  
Set honour in one eye, and death i' th' other,  
And I will look on both indifferently ;  
For, let the gods so speed me as I love  
The name of honour more than I fear death.

*Cass*. I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,  
As well as I do know your outward favour.

Well, honour is the subject of my story.—  
 I cannot tell what you and other men  
 Think of this life ; but, for my single self,  
 I had as lief not be as live to be  
 In awe of such a thing as I myself.  
 I was born free as Cæsar ; so were you :  
 We both have fed as well ; and we can both  
 Endure the winter's cold as well as he :  
 For once, upon a raw and gusty day,  
 The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,  
 Cæsar said to me, ' Dar'st thou, Cassius, now  
 Leap in with me into this angry flood,  
 And swim to yonder point ? ' Upon the word,  
 Accoutred as I was, I plungèd in,  
 And bade him follow : so, indeed, he did.  
 The torrent roar'd ; and we did buffet it  
 With lusty inews, throwing it aside  
 And stemming it with hearts of controversy :  
 But ere we could arrive the point propos'd,  
 Cæsar cried, ' Help me, Cassius, or I sink ! '   
 I, as Æneas, our great ancestor,  
 Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder  
 The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber  
 Did I the tirèd Cæsar : and this man  
 Is now become a god ; and Cassius is  
 A wretched creature, and must bend his body,  
 If Cæsar carelessly but nod on him.  
 He had a fever when he was in Spain,  
 And, when the fit was on him, I did mark  
 How he did shake : 'tis true, this god did shake :  
 His coward lips did from their colour fly ;  
 And that same eye, whose bend doth awe the world,  
 Did lose his lustre : I did hear him groan :  
 Ay, and that tongue of his, that bade the Romans  
 Mark him, and write his speeches in their books,  
 Alas, it cried, ' Give me some drink, Titinius,'  
 As a sick girl. Ye gods, it doth amaze me,  
 A man of such a feeble temper should  
 So get the start of the majestic world,  
 And bear the palm alone.

*Bru.* Another general shout !  
 I do believe that these applauses are  
 For some new honours that are heap'd on Cæsar.  
*Cass.* Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
 Like a Colossus ; and we petty men  
 Walk under his huge legs, and peep about  
 To find ourselves dishonourable graves.  
 Men at some time are masters of their fates :  
 The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
 But in ourselves, that we are underlings.  
 Brutus and Cæsar ; what should be in that Cæsar ?

Why should that name be sounded more than yours ?  
 Write them together, yours is as fair a name ;  
 Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well ;  
 Weigh them, it is as heavy ; conjure with 'em,  
 Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Cæsar.  
 Now, in the names of all the gods at once,  
 Upon what meat doth this our Cæsar feed,  
 That he is grown so great ? Age, thou art sham'd  
 Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods !  
 When went there by an age, since the great flood,  
 But it was fam'd with more than with one man ?  
 When could they say, till now, that talk'd of Rome,  
 That her wide walls encompass'd but one man ?  
 Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough,  
 When there is in it but only one man.  
 O, you and I have heard our fathers say,  
 There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd  
 Th' eternal devil to jeop his state in Rome  
 As easily as a king."

That Cæsar had suspicions of designs against himself is made evident in the play, and corroborated by the facts of history. For Plutarch tells us that Cæsar said to his friends one day, "I do not like pale looks." Another time when Antony and Dollabella were accused of designs against his person and government he said, "I have no apprehensions from those fat and sleek men, I rather fear the pale and lean ones," meaning Cassius and Brutus :—

" *Cæs.* Let me have men about me that are fat ;  
 Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights :  
 Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look ;  
 He thinks too much : such men are dangerous."

The event proved that Cæsar's diagnosis was correct.

The idea of approaching Mark Antony on the subject was no sooner discussed by the conspirators than very wisely abandoned. Both by his own words and by public repute Antony was the sworn and devoted servant of Cæsar, and though sufficiently ambitious and bold enough for any enterprise, if he had not revealed the plot altogether, he would probably have

shrunk with abhorrence from such an under-hand method of getting rid of his master.

Mark Antony was one of those magnificent beings that appear at intervals on the stage of the world's history. Endowed with a magnificent physique, and with nearly all the mental and physical gifts that the gods have to bestow, an experienced and capable man of affairs, a soldier second only to Cæsar himself, no mean orator, and capable of endearing and attracting to his person, not only the individual, but whole bodies of men, the darling of the soldiery, with friends in all classes and in every clime, he might, could he have kept his pleasures under control, and resisted the allurements and embraces of the Egyptian Queen—whom he himself called, and not very gallantly, that “Serpent of old Nile”—have adorned his own brow with the Imperial crown, instead of letting it rest, as it eventually did, on the head of the more cold-blooded and calculating Octavius.

By all accounts he was warm-hearted and generous to a fault, and probably would have died for a person, though not like Brutus, for an idea.

Plutarch tells us that he had—“A noble dignity of countenance, a graceful length of beard, a large forehead, an aquiline nose; and, upon the whole, the same manly aspect that we see in the pictures and statues of Hercules. There was, indeed, an ancient tradition that his family was descended from Hercules, by a son of his called ‘Anteus,’ and it was no wonder if Antony sought to confirm this opinion by affecting to resemble him in his air and dress.”

The great tragedy was accomplished in the Senate House at Rome on the Ides of March, B.C. 44. Casca gave the first blow, Brutus the last. Preceding the incident, there were portents in heaven above, and



in the earth beneath. According to Strabo, the philosopher, on the night preceding the murder of Cæsar, there were seen in the air men of fire encountering each other, and such a flame appeared to issue from the hand of a soldier's servant, that all the spectators thought it must be burned, yet when it was over he found no harm, and one of the victims which Cæsar offered was found without a heart:—

*Cic.* Good even, Casca : brought you Cæsar home ?  
Why are you breathless ? and why stare you so ?

*Casca.* Are not you mov'd, when all the sway of earth  
Shakes like a thing unfirm ? O Cicero,  
I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds  
Have riv'd the knotty oaks ; and I have seen  
Th' ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,  
To be exalted with the threatening clouds :  
But never till to-night, never till now,  
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.  
Either there is a civil strife in heaven ;  
Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,  
Incenses them to send destruction.

*Cic.* Why, saw you any thing more wonderful ?

*Casca.* A common slave—you know him well by sight—  
Held up his left hand, which did flame and burn  
Like twenty torches join'd ; and yet his hand,  
Not sensible to fire, remain'd unscorch'd.  
Besides,—I ha' not since put up my sword,—  
Against the Capitol I met a lion,  
Who glar'd upon me, and went surly by,  
Without annoying me : and there were drawn  
Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women,  
Transform'd with their fear ; who swore they saw  
Men, all in fire, walk up and down the streets.  
And yesterday the bird of night did sit  
Even at noonday upon the market-place,  
Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies  
Do so conjointly meet, let not men say,  
' These are their reasons,—they are natural ; '  
For, I believe, they are portentous things  
Unto the climate that they point upon."

As was but natural, consternation and indescribable confusion followed on the event. When Cæsar was despatched Brutus advanced to address the senate and to assign his reasons for what he had done, but



they could not bear to hear him ; they fled from the scene and filled the people with inexpressible horror and dismay. Antony and Lepidus, friends to Cæsar, hid themselves. Brutus and his confederates, yet warm from the slaughter, marched in a body with their bloody swords from the Senate House to the Capitol. And it is here that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Brutus the following ever memorable speech :—

*“ Third Cit.* The noble Brutus is ascended : silence !

*Bru.* Be patient till the last.

Romans, countrymen, and lovers ! hear me for my cause ; and be silent, that you may hear : believe me for mine honour ; and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe : censure me in your wisdom ; and awake your senses, that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Cæsar’s, to him I say, that Brutus’ love to Cæsar was no less than his. If, then, that friend demand why Brutus rose against Cæsar, this is my answer,—Not that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Cæsar were living, and die all slaves, than that Cæsar were dead, to live all free men ? As Cæsar loved me, I weep for him ; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it ; as he was valiant, I honour him : but, as he was ambitious, I slew him : there is tears for his love ; joy for his fortune ; honour for his valour ; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman ? If any, speak ; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman ? If any, speak ; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country ? If any, speak ; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

*Citizens.* None, Brutus, none.

*Bru.* Then none have I offended. I have done no more to Cæsar than you shall do to Brutus. The question of his death is enrolled in the Capitol ; his glory not extenuated, wherein he was worthy ; nor his offences enforced, for which he suffered death. Here comes his body, mourned by Mark

*Enter ANTONY and others, with CÆSAR’S body.*

Antony : who, though he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the commonwealth ; as which of you shall not ? With this I depart,—that, as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death.”

The speech exactly suits the courageous and steadfast character of Brutus. It is the speech of an idealist, a thinker, and a recluse, hardly suitable, one would think, to appease the wrath, or excite the admiration of a wondering, terror-stricken, and excitable Roman mob.

But a very different orator was approaching, one who understood the people, and appreciated their weaknesses to a nicety. For hark ! there is a shout and a clapping of hands, Mark Antony is mounting the strand—

*Ant.* Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ;  
 I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him,  
 The evil that men do lives after them,  
 The good is oft interred with their bones :  
 So let it be with Cæsar. The noble Brutus  
 Hath told you, Cæsar was ambitious.  
 If it were so, it was a grievous fault ;  
 And grievously hath Cæsar answer'd it.  
 Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest,—  
 For Brutus is an honourable man ;  
 So are they all, all honourable men,—  
 Come I to speak in Cæsar's funeral.  
 He was my friend, faithful and just to me :  
 But Brutus says he was ambitious ;  
 And Brutus is an honourable man.  
 He hath brought many captives home to Rome,  
 Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill :  
 Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious ?  
 When that the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept :  
 Ambition should be made of sterner stuff :  
 Yet Brutus says he was ambitious ;  
 And Brutus is an honourable man.  
 You all did see that on the Lupercal  
 I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
 Which he did thrice refuse : was this ambition ?  
 Yet Brutus says he was ambitious ;  
 And, sure, he is an honourable man.  
 I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,  
 But here I am to speak what I do know.  
 You all did love him once,—not without cause :  
 What cause withholds you, then, to mourn for him ?  
 O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,  
 And men have lost their reason !—Bear with me ;  
 My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar,  
 And I must pause till it come back to me.

*Ant.* But yesterday the word of Cæsar might

Have stood against the world : now lies he there,  
And none so poor to do him reverence.  
O masters, if I were dispos'd to stir  
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,  
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,  
Who, you all know, are honourable men :  
I will not do them wrong ; I rather choose  
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself, and you,  
Than I will wrong such honourable men.  
But here's a parchment with the seal of Cæsar,—  
I found it in his closet,—'tis his will :  
Let but the commons hear this testament,—  
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,—  
And they would go and kiss dead Cæsar's wounds,  
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood ;  
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,  
And, dying, mention it within their wills,  
Bequeathing it, as a rich legacy,  
Unto their issue.

Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it,  
It is not meet you know how Cæsar loved you,  
You are not wood, you are not stone, but men ;  
And being men, hearing the will of Cæsar,  
It will inflame you, it will make you mad,  
'Tis good news you know not that you are his heirs,  
For if you should, oh what would come of it ?

*Citizens.* Read the will, we'll hear it, Antony.

*Ant.* Will you be patient ? Will you stay awhile ?  
I have o'ershot myself to tell you of it,  
I fear I wrong the honourable men,  
Whose daggers have stabbed Cæsar. I do fear it.

*Sec. Cit.* They are villains, murderers, read the will.

*Ant.* You will compel me, then, to read the will ?  
Then make a ring about the corpse of Cæsar,  
And let me show you him that made the will.  
Shall I descend ? And will you give me leave ?

*Ant.* Nay, press not so upon me : stand far off.  
If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.  
You all do know this mantle ; I remember  
The first time ever Cæsar put it on,  
'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,  
That day he overcame the Nervii ;—  
Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through :  
See what a rent the envious Casca made :  
Through this the well beloved Brutus stabb'd ;  
And, as he plucked his cursed steel away,  
Mark how the blood of Cæsar follow'd it,  
As rushing out of doors to be resolv'd  
If Brutus so unkindly knock'd, or no ;  
For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel :

Judge, O you gods, how dearly Cæsar lov'd him !  
 This was the most unkindest cut of all ;  
 For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,  
 Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,  
 Quite vanquish'd him : then burst his mighty heart ;  
 And, in his mantle muffling up his face,  
 Even at the base of Pompey's statua,  
 Which all the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell.  
 O, what a fall was there, my countrymen !  
 Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,  
 Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.  
 O, now you weep ; and, I perceive, you feel  
 The dint of pity : these are gracious drops.  
 Kind souls, what, weep you when you but behold  
 Our Cæsar's vesture wounded ? Look you here,  
 Here is himself, marr'd, as you see, with traitors.

*First Cit.* O piteous spectacle !

*Sec. Cit.* O noble Cæsar !

*Third Cit.* O woful day !

*Fourth Cit.* O traitors, villains !

*First Cit.* O most bloody sight !

*Sec. Cit.* We will be revenged.

*Citizens.* Revenge,—about,—seek,—burn,—fire,—kill,—  
 slay,—let not a traitor live !

*Ant.* Stay, countrymen.

*First Cit.* Peace there ! hear the noble Antony.

*Sec. Cit.* We'll hear him, we'll follow him, we'll die with  
 him.

*Ant.* Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you  
 up

To such a sudden flood of mutiny.

They that have done this deed are honourable ;—

What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,

That made them do 't ;—they're wise and honourable,

And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.

I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts :

I am no orator, as Brutus is ;

But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,

That love my friend, and that they know full well

That gave me public leave to speak of him :

For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,

Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,

To stir men's blood ; I only speak right on ;

I tell you that which you yourselves do know ;

Show you sweet Cæsar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,

And bid them speak for me ; but were I Brutus,

And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony

Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue

In every wound of Cæsar, that should move

The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

*Citizens.* We'll mutiny."

The above great speech that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Antony is one of consummate skill and dexterity. It precisely suits the situation, and the character of Antony. Antony at the outset is uncertain of his position, both with the conspirators and the people. The speech of Brutus had not been without its effect, for at the conclusion the people cried out:—

“Live, Brutus, live, let him be Cæsar.”

Antony must undo the work Brutus had done, and that speedily, and he does it effectually and with all the subtlety of a practised demagogue. He temporizes at first and pretends that his sympathies are with both parties, but as he proceeds he gauges the pulse of his audience, they warm with his warmth, they keep pace with the speaker step by step, and are finally turned completely round, and demand with eagerness the death of the assassin:—

“If I were disposed to stir your hearts, I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong, and I would not do them wrong.”

He keeps up this pretence, and calls the conspirators honourable men right up to the end, but he gives the people clearly to understand what he really thinks of the conspirators. His speech gathers in power as he proceeds, and he drives home in words of lurid and telling power the enormity of the crime, its base ingratitude, its bloody accompaniments, its irreparable injury to the people and to the State, and finally winds up with an appeal which clinches the whole matter, and has always proved irresistible in every period of the world's history, and to whatever class it may be addressed—that is, the appeal to the pocket. Cæsar by his will

had been unbounded in his generosity to the people :—

“ *Ant.* Moreover he hath left you all his walks,  
His private arbours, and new-planted orchards  
On this side Tiber ; he hath left them you  
And to your heirs for ever, common pleasures  
To walk abroad and recreate themselves.  
Here was a Cæsar ! When comes such another ? ”

The marvels seen at the death of Cæsar were not all necessarily mythical and imagined, for Pliny tells us that, “ A comet made its appearance in the north, while we were celebrating the games in honour of Cæsar, and shone bright for seven days.” It was commonly believed to be a sign that the soul of Cæsar was admitted among the gods.

The result of the tragedy is well known to all. The new spirit which was animating the Roman world under Antony and Octavius, was pitted in battle two years later, on the site of Philippi, against the reactionary armies of old Rome under Brutus and Cassius. The latter were defeated; Cassius was slain, and Brutus fell upon his sword. Philippi is also celebrated in history as the place where the Apostle Paul first preached the Gospel in Europe.

But it was not until the battle of Actium was fought ten years later, and Antony was defeated and finally disposed of, that the Imperial idea found its fulfilment and complete realisation in the person of Octavius.

According to Plutarch, Cæsar's character altered much for the worse before his death. Cæsar himself, compared with the other characters in the play, presents but a sorry figure. His speech is pompous and arrogant, he swoons when offered the crown, and is deaf to boot. Why is this? Professor Dowden explains it in this way :—

“ It is the spirit of Cæsar which is the dominant



power in the tragedy. The contrast between the weakness of Cæsar's bodily presence in the first half of the play, and the might of his spiritual presence in the latter part of the play is emphasised by Shakespeare."

"The ghost of Cæsar," continues the Professor, "which appears on the night of the battle of Philippi, serves as a kind of visible symbol of the vast posthumous power of the dictator.

"Cassius dies with the words:—

" ' Cæsar thou art revenged  
Even with the sword that killed thee.' "

But this explanation hardly justifies the title *The Life and Death of Julius Cæsar*. The play certainly is not the "Life." Cæsar says very little, only appears three times, and is killed in the third act. *The Tragedie of Julius Cæsar* in the folio of 1623 is a much truer title; or the play might have been more appropriately called "Brutus."

The transition from the Julius Cæsar of Shakespeare to his *Antony and Cleopatra* is, as Dowden says, "like passing from a gallery of antique sculpture to a room splendid with the colours of Titian and Paul Veronese." Here the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life are gratified to the full. Antony is splendid and majestic.

" The demi-Atlas of the earth, the arm  
And burgonet of men."

Cleopatra is extravagant, beautiful, sensual, and voluptuous, but, withal, if there be any truth in the facts of history a nobler and finer character than Dowden is willing to allow. In a way, she was true to Antony. He was all to her, and she laid down her life for his sake. Even her conqueror, the cold-blooded Octavius, treats her with dignity and respect, and her spirited



behaviour extorts his admiration. As one writer says of her :—

“Cleopatra certainly possessed the virtues of fidelity and natural affection in a very eminent degree. She had several opportunities of betraying Antony, could she have been induced to it either by fear or ambition. Her tenderness for her children is always superior to her self-love, and she had a greatness of soul which Cæsar never knew.”

“Of all Shakespeare’s historical plays,” says Coleridge, “*Antony and Cleopatra* is by far the most wonderful. There is not one in which he has followed history so minutely, and yet there are few in which he impresses the notion of angelic strength so much. This is greatly owing to the manner in which the fiery force is sustained throughout, and to the numerous momentary flashes of nature, counteracting the historical abstraction.”

The following is Shakespeare’s gorgeous picture of Cleopatra and her barge :—

“ *Eno.* I will tell you.  
The barge she sat in, like a burnish’d throne,  
Burn’d on the water : the poop was beaten gold ;  
Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that  
The winds were love-sick with them ; th’ oars were silver,  
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
The water which they beat to follow faster,  
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,  
It beggar’d all description : she did lie  
In her pavilion—cloth-of-gold of tissue—  
O’er-picturing that Venus where we see  
The fancy outwork nature : on each side her  
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,  
With divers-colour’d fans, whose wind did seem  
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
And what they undid did.

*Agv.* O, rare for Antony !

*Eno.* Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,  
So many mermaids, tended her i’ th’ eyes,  
And made their bends adornings : at the helm  
A seeming mermaid steers : the silken tackle

Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,  
That yarely frame the office. From the barge  
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense  
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast  
Her people out upon her ; and Antony,  
Enthron'd i' the market-place, did sit alone,  
Whistling to th' air ; which, but for vacancy,  
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,  
And made a gap in nature.

*Agr.* Rare Egyptian !

*Eno.* Upon her landing, Antony sent to her,  
Invited her to supper : she replied,  
It should be better he became her guest ;  
Which she entreated : our courteous Antony,  
Whom ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard speak,  
Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the feast,  
And for his ordinary pays his heart  
For what his eyes eat only.

*Mec.* Now Antony must leave her utterly.

*Eno.* Never ; he will not :

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety ; other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies."

## CHAPTER XII

### *KING LEAR*

IN entering on *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, we are in a sense, leaving the old Shakespeare behind us, and entering on a new and later stage of his literary and dramatic career.

Many critics, and perhaps the majority and best of them, assert that in *King Lear* the genius of Shakespeare is at its zenith, and has reached its culminating point.

It is they say, the last great outburst of his titanic mind. The lightning is dazzling and brilliant, the thunder loud and prolonged, and reverberates all along the line, and in it Shakespeare almost exhausts the powers of his genius and his artistic dexterity.

This is doubtless true, but at the same time the attentive student cannot fail to discern that though Shakespeare's powers may be as great, and possibly greater in some directions than any he has hitherto exhibited, yet they are undergoing a change, and indications are not wanting that he has reached his meridian, and that the sun of his genius is commencing its decline.

We miss, and in some ways it is almost a relief, a certain hardness and metallic brilliancy, like the glare of the mid-day sun, which accompanies and manifests

itself at times in many of the historical and tragical pieces of his perfect maturity.

In *Lear*, notwithstanding the horrors related, Shakespeare is mellower than his wont, and handles his characters with elasticity, generosity, and allowance. We miss the "gentle Shakespeare," it is true, as far as the hard facts of the piece are concerned, but in his treatment and handling of the attendant sentiment and expression it reappears even greater than before.

The play presents a powerful and terrible picture, but Shakespeare's genius and his art are alike equal to the occasion. In its revelation of human character and in its pathological and psychological aspects it is maturer, and in it he mines deeper than in his wont.

Nor does his art lag behind his genius. At the first blush the characters and circumstances seem peculiarly ill-suited and difficult for proper artistic handling. The characters are abnormal, and the minds of most of them appear unhinged, violent, and grotesque, the very elements abet and accentuate their various aberrations, and add to the general welter and confusion. Could a play of any unity, sequence, and point be produced out of elements like these?

The master-mind of Shakespeare has answered for us the question, and answered it in the affirmative.

Lear himself may be taken to represent the embodiment of authority, and with the collapse and break up of the head and fount of power to whatever cause it may be attributed, whether to incapacity, imbecility, or decay, the whole body of the state becomes sick, and its whole heart faint.

And this is precisely what happens here. The character of Lear is not merely the central figure of the piece, but the *fons et origo*, the fountain from which all subsequent events naturally and inevitably

flow, characters develop, events take on their shapes, situations are created, and crimes committed—everything, in fact, in the play flows from and is inextricably interwoven and mixed up with the extraordinary collapse of the gigantic and grotesque figure of the king.

And here Shakespeare's great dexterity as an artist appears. Read the play hurriedly, and at first sight all seems purposeless and in confusion, without a suitable beginning, without middle, and with an end at once unsatisfactory and sad.

But read again, and again, and the meaning, unity, and splendour of the whole is gradually borne in upon the mind, and becomes more and more apparent.

Event follows upon event, almost inevitably, and in a natural sequence and order every character in the play is necessary not only to itself but to the rest; they reciprocally attract or repel as they do in real life, and make or mar each other.

Lear's imbecility, or at any rate his own conscious incapacity, first declares itself by the division of his kingdom between his two daughters, Goneril and Regan, and their husbands the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall respectively, the expulsion of Cordelia, and the rejection of her gentle and unobtrusive devotion.

The play opens in a manner somewhat clumsy and unusual. Lear's partition of the kingdom is the first act of his developing incapacity or insanity; but the test of his daughter's affections is a capricious, and unaccountable device, due doubtless, to the old king's rage, egoism, and eccentricity. It has been much commented on, but serves its purpose as a standing ground from whence to commence operations, and when the play is once fairly set going, all the rest follows naturally enough.

With the partition of the kingdom, and the marriage of his three daughters, troubles, both domestic and national, immediately began to disclose themselves, and give Shakespeare a fine opportunity for the delineation of the various characters embroiled in them, good, bad, and indifferent.

"In the play of *Lear*," says Dowden, "we come into contact with the imagination, the heart, the soul of Shakespeare, at the moment when they attained their most powerful and intense vitality."

"He was here," Hazlitt wrote, "fairly caught in the web of his own imagination."

And so he was! Shakespeare is almost blinded by and whirled away in the very storm that he himself has created. He appears like some mighty spirit entangled in, and hardly able to direct or control, the tragic terrors of a pagan world, and at the end of the play, like some blinded Samson, he puts forth all his powers, bends himself to destruction, and pulls down the pillars of his edifice on the unworthy occupants below.

Good and evil alike perish; the gentle Cordelia, the broken-down and imbecile king, together with the savage and unprincipled Goneril, Regan, and Edmund.

Edgar, the finest figure in the play, the devoted Kent, and the wise and statesmanlike Albany, alone survive and stand upright in the general wreckage.

Shakespeare, true to the laws of the universe and of his own nature, gives the ultimate victory to the good, and cosmos prevails over chaos in the end.

It is true that Cordelia perishes. She herself lies dead like some early martyr on the prostrate body of the pagan world.

Without pressing impersonal significance too far, Shakespeare may possibly here have intended the

gentle and loving figure of Cordelia to adumbrate the approaching spirit of Christianity, which was presently to supplant, supplement, and illuminate the hard sayings and inhumanity of heathen times.

Professor Dowden, reviewing the whole play, sums it up as follows:—

“*King Lear* is, indeed, the greatest single achievement in poetry of the Teutonic or northern genius. By its largeness of conception, and the variety of its details, by its revelation of a harmony existing between the forces of nature and the passions of man, by its grotesqueness and its sublimity, it owns kinship with the great cathedrals of Gothic architecture. To conceive, to compass, and to comprehend at once, in its stupendous unity, and in its almost endless variety, a building like the cathedral of Rheims, or that of Cologne, is a feat that might seem to defy the most athletic imagination. But the impression that Shakespeare’s tragedy produces, while equally large—almost monstrous—and equally intricate, lacks the material fixity and determinateness of that produced by these great works in stone. Everything in the tragedy is in motion, and the motion is that of a tempest. . . .

“All that we see around is tempestuously whirling and heaving, yet we are aware that a law presides over this vicissitude, and apparent incoherence.

“In *King Lear*, more than in any of his plays, Shakespeare stands in the presence of the mysteries of human life.”

To some minds this eulogy may appear a trifle inflated and extravagant. That depends largely on the recipient, and the state of mind with which he approaches the whole subject.

To the artistic mind the picture will present a very



different appearance to what it would to the casual observer and passer-by.

The philosopher, the poet, and the psychologist are ever prone to imagine that any work that commends itself to their minds must of necessity have in it something original, startling, and intense, and to read into the writings of another, the values and predilections of their own idiosyncrasies and understanding.

The casual and careless reader would probably see in a play like *Lear* nothing more than the wanderings and grumblings of a broken-down, dirty, and somewhat irascible old man, at once deserted and pursued by two ungrateful, vindictive, and ferocious daughters, bent on the destruction of a common nuisance, and themselves and their father the cause, if an unwilling one, of a whole decalogue of very common-place crimes, which should find their proper place in the Old Bailey, or the King's Bench Division, rather than at the judgment seat of some eulogistic and introspective philosopher.

But regarding the play either from the Old Bailey or the artistic point of view, or whichever way you will, it still remains if a somewhat irregular a splendid and imposing creation.

The upheaval and distraction of man's moral nature, and the confusion of the elements themselves which encourage and fan the flames, alike add to its solemnity and charm. It is unique in its way, and as a dramatic unity would be difficult to surpass.

Nor are the component parts neglected. All the individuals characters are clean cut, their types are unmistakable, and are drawn with a power and precision rarely equalled, even by the author himself.

There are, moreover, several brilliant and well-known aphorisms in the play, and it is adorned with

many beautiful touches of natural phenomena and scenery.

Let us turn to some of the leading personages in it, and first of all to the central figure of the piece, the eccentric king himself.

The same difficulty presents itself about Lear that presented itself about Hamlet. Was the king mad? More so certainly than Hamlet, but not entirely. His mind was disorganised and at times wandering. He is hurried from darkness into light, and from light to darkness, but the attacks are intermittent, and he seems to have completely recovered his senses on his recognition of and reconciliation with his daughter Cordelia at the end of the play.

He somewhat resembles another English king, our own George III. in his obstinacy, occasional incapacity, in his egoism, and unshakeable belief in his own infallibility.

His character from the first was what the French call *difficile* and self-willed.

The following is that given him by his daughters before they had any object or reason for disparaging him:—

“ *Reg.* ’Tis the infirmity of his age ; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

*Gon.* The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash ; then, must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal, the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.”

Lear’s dementia, or whatever may be the proper word for his mental disorganisation and affliction, reached its climax, and very naturally so, in the terrible midnight storm to which he was exposed.

But he still preserved his pride, and something of his reason, for he was too astute, battered by the

elements as he was, again to seek refuge in Gloster's house, or to trust to the protection of his daughter.

He was ultimately hurried off to Dover, where he recovered much of his self-possession, and finally his reason, on his recognition by and reconciliation with Cordelia before he dies, not of a disordered mind, but of a broken heart.

He was a fit subject, not for an asylum, but for a "home"—save the word, for in these days there are homes many and varied—but kings are notoriously difficult people to handle, and single countries, let alone homes, are not infrequently insufficient for their accommodation.

It is left for a Frenchman appropriately to describe the decline and fall of Lear, which he does with all a Frenchman's insight, sequence, and precision.

Why is it that meticulous and minute observation are so dear to the Gallic mind?

If the eye of a French man of letters happens to fall on his neighbour's boots, reposing outside the door of his neighbour's room, it is impossible for him to proceed without dilating on those boots, and entering into the minutest particulars of their cut, size, polish, and fit, nay, even their very angle of polarisation, and he proceeds at once to build up from their appearance the whole character, disposition, and size of their owner. Whereas, to the unimaginative eye of an Englishman, boots are boots, and nothing more. No wonder we are called barbarians.

Nothing, after all, is very much to an Englishman, he disregards boots, and has no heroes.

To the majority of Englishmen, even the great Duke of Wellington himself is only remembered by his nose and his boots, and Nelson rather by a certain sticky conglomeration of currants called "Nelson

cakes," than by any of his great naval achievements.

Ask the average Englishman what he thinks of any of the very greatest names in Church and State, and in nine cases out of ten his answer will be, "Oh, I suppose he was all right, *but!*"—and that completely exhausts the stock of his hero-worship.

This is doubtless due to the fact that in his heart of hearts an Englishman admits no superior to himself, and to this trait in his character his success in the world may be very largely attributed.

The following is Victor Hugo's criticism on Lear and his daughter, taken from a passage in his "William Shakespeare." It is better to give it in the original as a translation would merely mar its force and perspicuity.

"Et quelle figure que le père ! quelle cariatide ! C'est l'homme courbé. Il ne fait que changer de fardeaux, toujours plus lourds. Plus le vielliard faiblit, plus le poids augmente. Il vit sous la surcharge. Il porte d'abord l'empire, puis l'ingratitude, puis isolement, puis le desespoir, puis la faim et la soif, puis la folie, puis toute la nature. Les nuees vienneut sur sa tête, les forets l'accableut d'ombre, l'ouragan s'abat sur sa nугue, l'orage plombe son manteau, la pluie pese sur ses epaules, il marche plie et hagard, comme s'il avait les deux genoux de la nuit sur son dos. Eperdu et immense, il jette aux bourrasgues et aux greles ce cri epigue. Pourquoi me haissez-vous tempetes ? pourquoi me persecutez-vous ? Vous n'etes pas mes filles. Et alors, c'est fini, la lueur s'eteint, la raison se decourage, et s'en va, Lear est en enfance. Ah ! il est enfant, ce vieillard. Eh bien ! il lui faut une mère. Sa fille parait. Son unique fille, Cordelia. Car les deux autres, Regane et Goneril no sont plus ses filles, que de la qualite necessaire pour avoir droit au nom de parricides."

Shakespeare, it will be noticed — differing in this respect from the old play of the same title—places the story in heathen times, probably with the deliberate intention of showing how the various ideas and superstitions of antiquity affected men's minds and regulated their actions.

No principle apparently rules the lives of any one of the characters; they are naturally either good or evil, as the case may be, with the exception of the self-centred and egotistical Edmund, whose hard intellect and philosophic mind made him, like Richard III., adopt and deliberately act on the principle that the individual will was everything, and that all the world must give way before it, be the consequences what they might.

Edmund resembles Richard in many ways, he is not merely egotistical and unscrupulous, but fearless also. Such men are dangerous to themselves, their neighbours, and the community.

Edmund was not controlled like his natural father Gloster, even by superstition.

*Glo.* These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in the palaces, treason; and the bond cracked between son and father.

*Edm.* This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeit of our own behaviour) we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars: an if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on; an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star."

The only excuse that can be advanced for Edmund is that he was a bastard child, and had the stigma of

his birth upon him ; but his natural father Gloster treated him with great kindness, and even gave instant credence to Edmund's treacherous and concocted story about his legitimate son Edgar.

And how does Edmund repay him? By being participator in the plot of putting out his own father's eyes.

He was, moreover, the seducer, or would-be seducer, of two married women, and was told off to murder the king himself, and was only prevented from doing so by the accident of fortune.

It will be remembered that Richard III. at his death exclaims bitterly, "No man loves me."

In a similar way Edmund does show some signs of penitence and regret. For in the answer to his brother Edgar's exclamation :—

" My name is Edgar, and thy father's son.  
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us.

*Edm.* Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true :  
The wheel has come full circle ; I am here."

And again, as his life-blood ebbs away :—

" *Edm.* I pant for life : some good I mean to do  
Despite of my own nature. Quickly send—  
Be brief in it,—to the Castle ; for my writ  
Is on the life of Lear, and on Cordelia :—  
Nay send in time."

But Goneril and Regan, the two daughters of Lear, surpassed in ferocity even Edmund himself. They were furies rather than women. They hesitated at nothing ; parricide, murder, treachery, adultery, cruelty, were all alike to them, and they died as they lived, the one the murderer of the other.

What could be more shocking than a woman putting out in cold blood the eyes of Gloster, whose guest she was? One can hardly forgive even the gentle Shakespeare for not sparing us the terrible scene.

It makes the blood run cold. To be born blind is a sufficient affliction. But what must it be to have one's eyes destroyed, with every circumstance of barbarity, in the prime of life? Poor Gloster, when he looked his last upon the sun, must have felt like the blinded Samson in those grand lines of Milton:—

“ O, dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
 Irrecoverably dark total eclipse  
 Without all hope of day !  
 O first-created Beam, and thou great Word,  
 ‘ Let there be light, and light was over all ’ ;  
 Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree ?  
 The sun to me is dark,  
 And silent as the moon  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.  
 Since light so necessary is to life,  
 And almost life itself, if it be true  
 That light is in the soul,  
 She all in every part ; why was the sight  
 To such a tender ball as the eye confined,  
 So obvious and so easy to be quenched ? ”

Gloster is a type of the good-natured, easy-going, and kindly - hearted, noble man, very impulsive, very credulous, and with no great judgment or discernment. He is duped by his bastard son, Edmund, into believing that his legitimate son, Edgar—the finest character in the play—is a traitor to himself, and he pays the terrible penalty with the loss of his eyes. But he bows to the will of the gods, and bears his great affliction with submission.

“ *Glo.* O, you mighty gods,  
 This world I do renounce, and in your sights,  
 Shake patiently my great affliction off ;  
 If I could bear it longer, and not fall  
 To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,  
 My snuff, and loathed part of nature, should  
 Burn itself out.”

He dies of a heart, broken not with sorrow, but with



joy, when he re-discovers his son Edgar, and realises all that he had been to him :—

“ *Edg.* His flawed heart  
Alack too weak the conflict to support !  
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,  
Burst smilingly.”

Cordelia herself is the typical daughter of devotion.

Possibly she has been exalted into too great a figure. She only appears twice in the play, at the beginning and at the end.

She had a deep affection for her old father, and probably had the good sense to attribute his neglect of her to its true cause—his disorganised mind. After all she only did what the majority of women would do under similar circumstances, she came to the old man's assistance when he was beaten down and in dire distress. It is true she paid the penalty of her life for so doing, but that she could hardly have anticipated, as she had the French army at her back, and mere accident threw her and her father into the arms of their enemy. How bitterly she felt for him the following speech testifies :—

“ *Cor.* Had you not been their father, these white flakes  
Had challeng'd pity of them. Was this a face  
To be expos'd against the warring winds ?  
To stand against the deep, dread-bolted thunder ?  
In the most terrible and nimble stroke  
Of quick, cross lightening ? to watch poor perdu !  
With this thin helm ? Mine enemy's dog,  
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night  
Against my fire ; and wast thou fain, poor father,  
To hovel thee with swine, and rogues forlorn  
In short and musty straw ? Alack, Alack ! ”

And last, but not least, comes the “fool,” a “personage” in the play, and one by no means to be overlooked. The fool, needless to say, is no fool at all, but a very tender-hearted, sagacious, and clever attendant. He is bathos personified, a mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous.

It must be remembered that the so-called fools, clowns, and jesters of the feudal times, were by no means really what their appellations indicate. They were not infrequently the spies, counsellors, and comforters, as well as the entertainers of their masters. They were a privileged class, could say things that others would have been decapitated for, and could often by their sagacity detect an enemy, and by their bluffing wit could extract without being suspected, the secrets of their masters' guests.

The "fool" in *Lear*, had all the virtues of this class.

He loved his master, and did what he could for him under very trying conditions.

He was to Lear very much what Sam Weller was to Mr Pickwick, and was accorded the same license in speech and action.

His apparent folly, and seemingly senseless jokes, were in reality a device to comfort Lear, by attuning his own mind to that of the king, and thereby creating a fellowship in misfortune.

As Mr Hudson says, "There is a velvet-footed delicacy in the fool's antics, as if he were treading on holy ground."

In the terrible storm to which he and his master were alike exposed, he endeavours to soothe the king's feelings by a childlike ballad:—

"He that has, and a little tiny wit,—  
With hey ho, the wind and the rain—  
Must make content with his fortune fit;  
Though the rain, it raineth every day."

His apparently foolish utterances are really wise sayings in disguise, attempts to direct his master's reason into the right channel, and make him realise his failings and position.

It was neither a fool nor knave who speaks thus :—

“ That, sir, which serves and seeks for gain,  
 And follows but for form,  
 Will pack when it begins to rain,  
 And leave thee in the storm.  
 But I will tarry ; the fool will stay  
 And let the wise man fly ;  
 The knave turns fool that runs away,  
 The fool no knave, perdy.”

In the play there are some very fine descriptions of nature and natural phenomena. Space prevents us from giving more than two. The following is that of a thunderstorm :—

“ *Kent.* Alas, sir, are you here ? things that love night,  
 Love not such nights as these ; the wrathful skies  
 Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,  
 And make them keep their caves ; since I was man,  
 Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,  
 Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never  
 Remember to have heard : man’s nature cannot carry  
 Th’ affliction, nor the fear.

*Lear.* Let the great gods,  
 That keep this dreadful pothor o’er our heads  
 Find out their enemies now.”

The effect on the eye of objects when seen from a height could hardly be better portrayed than in the following lines :—

“ *Edg.* Come on, sir ; here’s the place : stand  
 Still—— How fearful  
 And dizzy ’tis, to cast one’s eyes so low !  
 The crows and choughs that wing the mid-way air  
 Show scarce so gross as beetles : half way down  
 Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade !  
 Methinks he seems no bigger than his head :  
 The fisherman that walks upon the beach,  
 Appear like mice ; and yon tall anchoring bark,  
 Diminish’d to her cock ; her cock, a buoy  
 Almost too small for sight : the murmuring surge,  
 That on the unnumber’d idle pebbles chafes,  
 Cannot be heard so high—I’ll look no more ;  
 Let my brain turn and the deficient sight  
 Topple down headlong.”

And again, speaking of Dover, he says :—

“ There is a cliff whose high and bending head  
Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.”

To sum up, we have the four good characters on the one side, Edgar, Cordelia, Gloster, and the devoted Kent, who served and was true to his master throughout, with a devoted and dog-like fidelity, and on the other side, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, all contending for, and revolving round the distracted person of the King.

Shakespeare, true to the laws of the universe and of cosmos, gives the victory to the good in the end ; Cordelia alone perishes in the general distraction and calamity.

Dowden professes himself unable to discover any direct point or purpose in the play, for he says :—

“ But though ethical principles radiate through the play of *Lear*, its chief function is not even indirectly to teach or inculcate moral truth, but rather, by the presentation of a vision of human life, and of the enveloping forces of nature, to ‘ free, arouse, dilate.’ ”

But surely, without putting too great a stress on the imagination, Shakespeare has two possible objects in view. One to contrast the Christian and pagan virtues as displayed and revealed in character, and the other which, at any rate, is obvious, to exhibit the baneful results, both to the home and the nation, that follow on the wreckage and break-up of the ultimate and central authority.

He significantly uses the word “ authority ” on several occasions.

“ *Kent.* Authority.

*Lear.* There thou mightest behold the great image of authority.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### *CYMBELINE*

*CYMBELINE* is rather a short, concise, and dramatic story ; very vivid and full of life and action, in short, a novelette rather than a play. It must have been exceedingly difficult to stage, even in the early days of the drama, when the audience were much less exacting than they are now in the matter of representation, and were satisfied with but a very slight approximation to reality in the artistic setting, scenery, and surroundings, demanded by the play.

In Shakespeare's time, as has been observed, the unities of time and space in the drama were frequently disregarded altogether, appropriate setting was equally neglected, and all sorts of clumsy makeshifts and expedients had to be resorted to. The words, the action, and the acting were everything ; fidelity in staging was largely and almost inevitably neglected, as the playwrights and stage-managers of those days had not the long experience of these, and were wanting in the wealth of upholstery and mechanical contrivance which are always ready to hand and available in these, to the managers of very second-rate and provincial performances.

But even now to stage, with fidelity and effect, such a piece as *Cymbeline* would tax the resources of the most experienced to the uttermost.

Wars and battles are proverbially difficult subjects

to cope with and handle satisfactorily on the stage, and when we are confronted with Roman legions contending with the barbarian hordes of a British king off the wild coast of Milford Haven, the difficulty of adequate reproduction would be still further enhanced.

The difficulties attaching to the scene in which Imogen meets her brothers in the outlaw's cave, might be more readily overcome, but the descent of Jove from heaven on an eagle could not be so easily disposed of. The aeroplane doubtless might be successfully utilised for the occasion, but a bemuffled and begoggled aviator descending from the skies in the very inartistic construction of a modern airship would, to say the least of it, hardly inspire the audience with that awe and reverence that should be due and forthcoming from mortal man, when he finds himself unexpectedly in the presence of the greatest of the gods.

The names of Cymbeline and of his two sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, appear in the old chronicle, and Cymbeline, the successor of Caswallan, can readily be identified with the Cynobelin of history. The account which Iachimo gives in the play of the decorations and fittings of Imogen's bedroom may at first sight appear incongruous with the times.

Shakespeare might, through the mouth of Iachimo, be describing the boudoir of some contemporary lady of Italy, rather than the bed-chamber of a barbarian princess, but it must be remembered that the Britons, through their commerce with Gaul, must have derived some tincture of Roman civilisation, and the gold coin that was struck in honour of Cynobelin bears witness to the fact.

According to Collier, some of the chief incidents of the plot are to be found in French, Italian, and English.

A novel by Boccacio has many corresponding features, but there the villain, instead of being forgiven as he is here, is punished by being anointed with honey, and exposed in the sun to flies, wasps, and mosquitoes, which eat the flesh from his bones.

Collier, moreover, informs us that a certain man named Forman, an astrologer, who was present at, and saw the piece acted, about the year 1611, gives the following succinct, though rather incomplete and erratic account of the plot of *Cymbeline* in his "Booke of Plaies and Notes" thereof:—

"Remember, also, the story of Cymbeline, King of England in Lucius' time, how Lucius came from Octavius Cæsar for tribute, and being denied, after sent Lucius with a great army of soldiers, who landed at Milford Haven, and after were vanquished by Cymbeline, and Lucius taken prisoner; and all by means of three outlaws, of the which two of them were the sons of Cymbeline, stolen from him when they were but two years old by an old man whom Cymbeline banished; and he kept them as his own sons twenty years with him in a cave; and how one of them slew Cloten, that was the Queen's son, going to Milford Haven to seek the love of Imogen, the King's daughter, whom he had banished also for loving his daughter."

"And how the Italian that came from her love, conveyed himself into a chest and said it was a chest of plate sent from her love and others to be presented to the King. And in the deepest of the night, she being asleep, he opened the chest and came forth of it, and viewed her in her bed and the marks of her body, and took away her bracelet, and afterwards accused her of adultery to her love. And in the end,



how he came with the Romans into England, and was taken prisoner, and after revealed to Imogen, who had turned herself into man's apparel, and fled to meet her love at Milford Haven, and chanced to fall on the cave in the woods, where her two brothers were, and how by eating a sleeping charm they thought she had been dead, and laid her in the woods and the body of Cloten by her, in her love's apparel that he left behind him, and how she was found by Lucius."

Imogen, one of the most artless and tender of Shakespeare's women, is the heroine and central figure of the piece; all the other characters seem created to subserve her for good or evil, to test her metal, to contribute to her misfortunes, or to strengthen and sustain her with devotion and affection.

She is one of those women who, notwithstanding her physical beauty, men love, not so much after the flesh as after the spirit. She has a heart quick and ardent; there is nothing grand or massive in her, and she is what would be called in these days "a plucky woman." She is called chaste as Dian, and sometimes held up as a paragon of virtue. But her virtue was never greatly tried, for by nature she was neither sensual nor passionate.

Iachimo's attempt on her chastity was done with a purpose, and was neither sincere nor sustained.

She must have been a frail woman indeed to have succumbed, at a first interview, to a yellow-visaged Italian, a complete stranger to herself.

Cloten's love for her was, in its way, persistent and sincere, but Cloten was a brute and a boor, and Imogen hated the very sight of him.

What makes her the attractive figure that she is, is her gentleness, and the spirited way in which she meets

her misfortunes, and with the aid and support of the devoted Pisanio, surmounts them all, and is reunited in the end to her husband and lover Posthumus.

Shakespeare is somewhat inconsistent in his portrayal of the character of Posthumus. There never was such a man !

*" First Gent.* He is a creature such  
As, to seek through the regions of the earth  
For one his like, there would be something failing  
In him that should compare :—I do not think  
So fair an outward, and such stuff within,  
Endows a man but he.

*Second Gent.* You speak him far.

*First Gent.* I do extend him, sir, within himself ;  
Crush him together, rather than unfold  
His measure duly."

Indeed, so much was Posthumus thought of, not only in earth, but in heaven, that it is necessary for Jupiter himself to descend and to intervene in a dream on his behalf.

His behaviour towards Imogen throws a curious side-light on the manners of the period, and may be traced to Italian influence.

It never seems to strike Shakespeare that it was, to say the least of it, unbecoming in a soldier and a gentleman that Posthumus should make a heavy bet with a complete stranger and a foreigner on his wife's chastity and powers of resistance. But this is what he makes Posthumus do.

In this respect, at any rate, Posthumus was worse than Iachimo. Posthumus, whatever may have been his domestic virtues and qualities as a soldier, must have been somewhat of a fool, and credulous and impetuous in the extreme. He was as eager to embrace suspicion as Othello himself. He lends a willing and ready ear to the trumped-up story of Iachimo, and trusts him of whom he knew nothing before his wife whom he

knew and loved well. Iachimo's evidence seems at first sight alarming, and, up to a certain point, Posthumus gauges its value accurately.

Iachimo's knowledge of the fittings and furniture of Imogen's bedroom might very well have been obtained from the servants. Iachimo might even, as Posthumus suggests, have heard it from himself:—

*Post.* This is true.

And this you might have heard of here by me or by some other."

Moreover, the possession of Imogen's bracelet by Iachimo could be very easily accounted for.

*Post.* May be she plucked it off  
To send it me."

What clinches the case against Imogen in the mind of Posthumus is Iachimo's knowledge of the birthmarks on her breast, but if Posthumus had reflected for a moment, he might and should have attributed this knowledge to information imparted by others, or at least he might have waited until he had heard Imogen's own account of the matter through the agency of Pisanio; instead of that he despatches Pisanio to kill Imogen off-hand, and bursts into the following fierce tirade against the whole race of women:—

“ Could I find out  
The woman's part in me ! For there's no motion  
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm  
It is the woman's part : be 't lying, note it,  
The woman's ; flattering, hers ; deceiving, hers ;  
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers ; revenges, hers ;  
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,  
Nice longing, slanders, mutability,  
All faults that may be nam'd, nay, that hell knows,  
Why, hers, in part or all ; but rather, all ;  
For even to vice  
They are not constant, but are changing still  
One vice, but of a minute old, for one  
Not half so old as that. I'll write against them,  
Detest them, curse them :—yet 'tis greater skill  
In a true hate, to pray they have their will,  
The very devils cannot plague them better.”

Pisanio is a fine character, devoted both to his master and his mistress, whom he serves admirably well, to his own apparent great detriment and loss. He point blank refuses to run a knife into Imogen, though she herself implores him to do so:—

*Imo.* Do his bidding, strike,  
Thou may'st be valiant in a better cause,  
But now thou seem'st a coward.

*Pis.* Hence, vile instrument,  
Thou shalt not damn my hand."

Both Iachimo and Posthumus live bitterly to repent of their treatment of the much abused and innocent Imogen.

*Iach.* The heaviness and guilt within my bosom  
Takes off my manhood : I've belied a lady,  
The princess of this country, and the air on't  
Revengingly enfeebles me ; or could this carl,  
A very drudge of nature's, have subdu'd me  
In my profession ? Knighthoods and honours, borne  
As I wear mine, are titles but of scorn.  
If that thy gentry, Britain, go before  
This lout as he exceeds our lords, the odds  
Is, that we scarce are men, and you are gods.  
For Imogen's dear life take mine ; and though  
'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life ; you coin'd it :  
'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp ;  
Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake :  
You rather mine, being yours : and so, great powers,  
If you will take this audit, take this life,  
And cancel these cold bonds.—O Imogen !  
I'll speak to thee in silence."

Indeed, as has been said, there is more excuse for Iachimo than there is for Posthumus. Iachimo, after the manner of his countrymen, in a moment of braggadocio made a bet, his object being, not so much to seduce Imogen, as to establish his assertion that Englishwomen were not more virtuous than those of his own country. He makes no real and persistent effort to compass the fall of Imogen. After discovering what he wished to discover he departs.

Shakespeare's whole attitude and treatment of sexual morality, and of the relation of the sexes towards each other, is rather inconsistent and unaccountable. Through the mouths of his characters he is exceedingly severe, especially on the women, for any violation or suspicion of violation of the marriage bond, and seems to think like the Jews of old, that death alone could wipe out the stain. For the rest, though he never gives vice his approbation, his attitude towards it in speech, at any rate, is one of great laxity and indifference. His language is unrestrained and frequently licentious and obscene. This latter may be attributed to several causes, first to his own lowly origin—Bacon and Spenser, who were his contemporaries and who belonged to a higher order of society, would never have permitted themselves such license, or have dreamt of putting down in writing the language that Shakespeare employs. Secondly, to the nature of his calling, that of an actor and a playwright. The stage has never been conspicuous for observing the niceties of the moral law, and was probably far more lax in the days of Shakespeare than it is even in these. Shakespeare, after all, when he entered the profession, was but an inexperienced and uncultivated youth, and the manners of the stage, its language and general laxity, must have profoundly affected, not only his words, but his thoughts.

Then again, it was the age of the Renaissance, of a new birth, of a breaking away from the past both in thought and action, not only in one country, but in nearly all. Freedom was everywhere, in the air, and freedom attended by considerable license. The social breath of Italy, which was by no means always wholesome, was passing over the land, and would naturally affect first and most powerfully the sensitive

and unbalanced minds of imaginative and, for the most part, poverty-stricken playwrights.

The earlier dramatists, some of the immediate predecessors or contemporaries of Shakespeare, such as Nash, Greene and Marlowe, were for the most part poor, and reckless in their poverty ; wild livers, defiant of law or common fame, in revolt against the usages of religion, haunting the brothel and the alehouse, and dying starved or in tavern brawls.

The marvel is that among such a company as that Shakespeare did not lose his head altogether, and it speaks well for the natural rectitude of his character, and for the power and balance of his mind, that he was able to steer the course he did, and to prosecute to the finish the labours he had set himself to perform.

Cymbeline the King, and his Queen, bear a shadowy resemblance to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth respectively, but they are neither of them such forceful characters.

Cymbeline himself plays but a small part in the piece. His wife is the active and stirring spirit on the side of iniquity, and is at the root of all the subsequent mischief. She resembles Lady Macbeth in her ambition alone ; she is ambitious of a crown for her son, precisely as Lady Macbeth was of a crown for her husband, and neither of them hesitate at murder to accomplish their end. She was a self-willed woman, plausible, selfish, and subtle. There is a certain resolution, splendour, and magnificence about Lady Macbeth that fascinates the mind, and captivates the will, whereas the queen in *Cymbeline* is underhand and mean, and resorts to poison to effect her end ; but her would-be victim escapes her in time, and the poison destroys no one but herself. Perhaps she more



nearly resembles the queen in *Hamlet*. Beautiful and sensual, she has no more real love for the king—she confesses it on her death-bed—than the queen in *Hamlet* had for her first husband.

The scene in the cave of Belarius the outlaw, the putative father of the king's two sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, in which Imogen for the first time encounters in disguise these her two brothers, is one of the most attractive in the piece. It is delineated with great delicacy and skill. The behaviour of the two lads to their disguised and unknown sister is both touching and true. They are intended to imagine the girl to be a lad, and whether they did or did not see through the disguise, they both fall in love with her, or rather love her.

Imogen is one of those women, and Shakespeare evidently intended her to be so, who without exciting the passions, constrain the affection and devotion of mankind.

“Clay and clay differs in dignity,  
Whose dust is both alike.”

“*Gui.* I love thee, I have spoke it,  
As I do love my father.

*Arv.* If it be sin to say so, sir, I yoke me  
In my good brother's fault, I know not why  
I love this youth, and I have heard you say  
Love's reason's without reason.”

The lamentations of the two over her imagined and untimely death are equally sweet—

“*Gui.* Why, he but sleeps :  
If he be gone, he'll make his grave a bed,  
With female fairies will his tomb be haunted,  
And worms will not come to thee.

*Arv.* With fairest flowers,  
Whilst summer lasts, and I hie here, Fidele,  
I'll sweeten thy sad grave.”

The Roman General Lucius is equally attracted by



the disguised girl, and treats her with all the dignity and courtesy of a Roman gentleman :—

“ *Luc.* Thy name ?

*Imo.* Fidele, sir.

*Luc.* Thou dost approve thyself the very same,  
Thy name well fits thy faith, thy faith thy name.  
Wilt take thy chance with me ? I will not say  
Thou shalt be so well master'd, but, be sure  
No less belov'd.  
Be cheerful, wipe thine eyes,  
Some falls are means the happier to arise.”

The descent from heaven of Jove on an eagle even in a dream, seems rather unnecessarily thrust into the piece, and the character and conduct of Posthumus hardly justify his intervention, or warrant so great a condescension. Jove's address to the ghosts is adequate and sufficient, if not exactly Miltonic.

But it is difficult for mortal man, even such a mortal as Shakespeare, to put words adequate or sufficient, into the mouth of the king of heaven.

“ *JUPITER descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle : he throws a thunderbolt. The Ghosts fall on their knees.*

*Jup.* No more, you petty spirits of region low,  
Offend our hearing ; hush ! How dare you ghosts  
Accuse the thunderer, whose bolt, you know,  
Sky-planted, batters all rebelling coasts ?  
Poor shadows of Elysium, hence ; and rest  
Upon your never-withering banks of flowers :  
Be not with mortal accidents opprest ;  
No care of yours it is ; you know 'tis ours.  
Whom best I love I cross ; to make my gift,  
The more delay'd, delighted. Be content ;  
Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift :  
His comforts thrive, his trials well are spent.  
Our Jovial star reign'd at his birth, and in  
Our temple was he married.—Rise, and fade !—  
He shall be lord of lady Imogen,  
And happier much by his affliction made.  
This tablet lay upon his breast ; wherein  
Our pleasure his full fortune doth confine :  
And so, away ! no further with your din  
Express impatience, lest you stir up mine.—  
Mount, eagle, to my palace crystalline. [*Ascends.*]

*Sici.* He came in thunder ; his celestial breath  
Was sulphurous to smell : the holy eagle  
Stoop'd, as to foot us : his ascension is  
More sweet than our bless'd fields : his royal bird  
Prunes the immortal wing, and cloyes his beak,  
As when his god is pleas'd.

*All.* Thanks, Jupiter !

*Sici.* The marble pavement closes, he is enter'd  
His radiant roof.—Away ! and, to be blest,  
Let us with care perform his great behest."

It will be noticed that Shakespeare says that "his celestial breath was sulphurous to smell." "Sulphurous" is an epithet generally connected with the nether regions, but the preceding line, "He came in thunder" explains its application.

One hesitates to correct Shakespeare on a point of linguistic propriety, but surely "Thanks, Jupiter," is rather familiar and unsuitable language for the Shades to use in addressing their master. It reminds one too much of the colloquialism of modern slang, "Thanks, old chap."

Shakespeare rarely quotes the Bible, and when he does inculcate its virtues and its principles his language is as dissimilar to that of the Bible as language can well be. But in this play he enunciates two biblical sayings, which though not identical, are one in thought, and resemble one another very nearly in expression. He says in the preceding quotation:—

" Whom best I love I cross."

The thought is identical with the "Whom the Lord loves he chastens" of Scripture.

And again he makes Belarius say, when discussing the burial of Cloten:—

" Though mean and mighty rotting  
Together have our dust, yet reverence  
That angel of the world doth make distinction  
Of place between high and low. Our foe was princely,  
And though you took his life as being our foe,  
Yet bury him as a prince."

This calls to mind Jehu's observation on the death of Jezebel, "Come, fetch me now this cursed woman, and bury her." And why? Not because she is a woman, but—"for she is a king's daughter."

Shakespeare here, as elsewhere, shows his invariable respect for office, birth, and authority.

He is, moreover a great believer in the principles of heredity. The two supposed children of Belarius were really the sons of a king, and the promptings of their royal birth and breeding could not always be suppressed:—

"*Bel.* How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature !  
 These boys know little they are sons to the king ;  
 Nor Cymbeline dreams that they are alive.  
 They think they're mine ; and, though train'd up thus meanly  
 I' the cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit  
 The roofs of palaces ; and nature prompts them,  
 In simple and low things, to prince it much  
 Beyond the trick of others. This Polydore,—  
 The heir of Cymbeline and Britain, who  
 The king his father call'd Guiderius,—Jove !  
 When on my three-foot stool I sit, and tell  
 The warlike feats I've done, his spirits fly out  
 Into my story : say, ' Thus mine enemy fell,  
 And thus I set my foot on's neck ; ' even then  
 The princely blood flows in his cheek, he sweats,  
 Strains his young nerves, and puts himself in posture  
 That acts my words. The younger brother, Cadwal,—  
 Once Arviragus,—in as like a figure  
 Strikes life into my speech, and shows much more  
 His own conceiving.

*Bel.* O thou goddess,  
 Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st  
 In these two princely boys ! They are as gentle  
 As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,  
 Not wagging his sweet head ; and yet as rough,  
 Their royal blood enchaf'd, as the rud'st wind,  
 That by the top doth take the mountain pine,  
 And make him stoop to the vale. 'Tis wonder  
 That an invisible instinct should frame them  
 To royalty unlearn'd ; honour untaught ;  
 Civility not seen from other ; valour,  
 That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop  
 As if it had been sow'd. Yet still it's strange  
 What Cloten's being here to us portends,  
 Or what his death will bring us."

The dialogue between Posthumus, when condemned to the gallows and his gaoler, reminds one of the dialogue between Hamlet and the grave-diggers. There is in both the same half-mocking banter, jest, and indifference, which is true to the life among a certain class of men under similar conditions. It is doubtless, largely assumed, and utilised as a mask under which to hide that inner dread which all men must feel when under sentence of, or in presence of death:—

*“First Gaol.* Come, sir, are you ready for death ?

*Post.* Over-roasted rather ; ready long ago.

*First Gaol.* Hanging is the word, sir : if you be ready for that, you are well cooked.

*Post.* So, if I prove a good repast to the spectators, the dish pays the shot.

*First Gaol.* A heavy reckoning for you, sir. But the comfort is, you shall be called to no more payments, fear no more tavern-bills ; which are often the sadness of parting, as the procuring of mirth : you come in faint for want of meat, depart reeling with too much drink ; sorry that you have paid too much, and sorry that you are paid too much ; purse and brain both empty,—the brain the heavier for being too light, the purse too light being drawn of heaviness : of this contradiction you shall now be quit.—O, the charity of a penny cord ! it sums up thousands in a trice : you have no true debtor and creditor but it ; of what’s past, is, and to come, the discharge :—your neck, sir, is pen, book, and counters ; so the acquittance follows.

*Post.* I am merrier to die than thou art to live.

*First Gaol.* Indeed, sir, he that sleeps feels not the tooth-ache : but a man that were to sleep your sleep, and a hangman to help him to bed, I think he would change places with his officer ; for, look you, sir, you know not which way you shall go.”

If Shakespeare in *Cymbeline* has lost something of his wonted concentrated grip, energy, and power, the piece is attractive and varied and the characters animated and in motion. With the riddance and destruction of the two evil spirits, the Queen and her son Cloten, the play ends as it should in reconciliation and forgiveness all round. Imogen is made happy at last, and the light of joy returns to her eye.

" *Cym.*

See,

Posthúmus anchors upon Imogen ;  
And she, like harmless lightning, throws her eye  
On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting  
Each object with a joy : the counterchange  
Is severally in all.—Let's quit this ground,  
And smoke the temple with our sacrifices.—  
[*To Belarius*] Thou art my brother ; so we'll hold thee ever.

*Imo.* You are my father too ; and did relieve me,  
To see this gracious season.

*Cym.*

All o'erjoy'd,

Save these in bonds : let them be joyful too,  
For they shall taste our comfort.

*Imo.*

My good master,

I will yet do you service.

*Luc.*

Happy be you !

*Cym.* The fórlorn soldier, that so nobly fought,  
He would have well becom'd this place, and grac'd  
The thankings of a king.

*Post.*

I am, sir,

The soldier that did company these three  
In poor beseeching ; 'twas a fitment for  
The purpose I then follow'd.—That I was he,  
Speak, Iachimo : I had you down, and might  
Have made you finish.

*Iach.*

I am down again : [*Kneeling.*

But now my heavy conscience sinks my knee,  
As then your force did. Take that life, beseech you,  
Which I so often owe : but your ring first ;  
And here the bracelet of the truest princess  
That ever swore her faith.

*Post.*

Kneel not to me :

The power that I have on you is to spare you ;  
The malice towards you to forgive you : live,  
And deal with others better.

*Cym.*

Nobly doom'd !

We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law ;  
Pardon's the word to all."

Imogen recognises her husband, and, embracing him,  
says :—

" *Imo.* Why did you throw your wedded lady from you ? "

" *Post.* Hang there like fruit, my soul, till the tree die."

And Iachimo is very handsomely forgiven by the  
injured Posthumus and the king himself.

Caius Lucius the Roman general is spared, and

Cymbeline though the victor, again submits to Cæsar and to the Roman Empire.

The following ditty does not end but is in the piece, and is too pretty to be omitted.

## SONG

*“ Hark, hark ! the lark at heaven’s gate sings  
And Phœbus gins arise,  
His steeds to water at those springs  
On chalic’d flowers that lies ;  
And winking Mary-buds begin  
To ope their golden eyes :  
With everything that pretty is,  
My lady sweet, arise ;  
Arise, arise ! ”*

## CHAPTER XIV

### *THE TEMPEST*

ON arriving at *The Tempest*, we reach one of the latest, if not the last, of Shakespeare's plays. It is a remarkable play in many ways, and has been the cause of considerable discussion, both as to the date of its composition, and as to its precise meaning and its inner intent.

There are many reasons, both from internal and external evidence, that if not the very last—for *The Winter's Tale*, *Henry VIII.*, and perhaps *Cymbeline* may have actually succeeded it in point of time, though following close upon its heels—it is at any rate, the last expression of Shakespeare's mind, and a sort of farewell to the stage and to the world.

It is, of course, dangerous for an untrained mind to jump too hastily to conclusions, on the strength of what is called internal evidence alone—that is, evidence derived from the style and language. But Collier, a very accurate and devoted Shakespearian scholar, and with a mind for a critic unusually judicial, together with the somewhat fantastic Coleridge, the philosophic Schlegel, Professor Dowden himself, and many others, all agree that the style, language, and sentiment of the piece are a sure indication as to its date, and unhesitatingly place it among the very latest of Shakespeare's creations.

It is a play quite unique in its way, very individualistic



with its own peculiarities, like an island, cut off and remote from the great continent of the works that preceded it.

Is the play an enigma? Is Shakespeare speaking allegorically and in parables? Does he wish the world to understand by it something more than the natural and surface value the words themselves convey?

Some minds, especially very imaginative ones, are frequently only too prone to read hidden and cryptic meanings into the writings and utterances of every great writer, which very probably were absent from his mind altogether, and quite foreign to his intentions. But here at any rate, we have a *prima facie* case for speculation, and for speculation followed by belief. It can hardly be denied that there is an inner, as well as surface meaning to the piece. What is that inner meaning, and what that parable?

Interpretations, and some of them rather far-fetched and fantastic, have been placed on the various characters: "Caliban is understanding apart from imagination," declares Professor Lowell. "He is the primitive man abandoned to himself," declares M. Mezieres. That Caliban is the missing link between man and brute has been elaborately demonstrated by Daniel Wilson—"Caliban is one of the powers of nature over which the scientific intellect obtains command," and so forth.

But the interpretation that commends itself most to the mind of the present writer, and which bears on it the stamp of at least a high probability, is that suggested by Professor Lowell:—

"The following passage from Professor Lowell will compensate for its length by its ingenuity. 'In *The Tempest* the scene is laid nowhere, or certainly in no country laid down on any map. Nowhere, then? At once nowhere and anywhere,—for it is in the soul of man that still vexed island hung between the

upper and the nether world, and liable to incursions from both. . . . Consider for a moment if ever the Imagination has been so embodied as in Prospero, the Fancy as in Ariel, the brute Understanding as in Caliban, who, the moment his poor wits are warmed with the glorious liquor of Stephano, plots rebellion against his natural lord, the higher Reason. Miranda is mere abstract Womanhood, as truly so before she sees Ferdinand as Eve before she was awakened to consciousness by the echo of her own nature coming back to her, the same, and yet not the same, from that of Adam. Ferdinand, again, is nothing more than Youth, compelled to drudge at something he despises, till the sacrifice of will, and abnegation of self, win him his ideal in Miranda. The subordinate personages are simply types: Sebastian and Antonio, of weak character and evil ambition; Gonzalo, of average sense and honesty; Adrian and Francisco, of the walking gentlemen, who served to fill up a world. They are not characters in the same sense with Iago, Falstaff, Shallow, or Leontius; and it is curious how every one of them loses his way in this enchanted island of life, all the victims of one illusion after another, except Prospero, whose ministers are purely ideal. The whole play, indeed, is a succession of illusions, winding up with those solemn words of the great enchanter, who had summoned to his service every shape of merriment or passion, every figure in the great tragi-comedy of life, and who was now bidding farewell to the scene of his triumphs. For in Prospero shall we not recognise the Artist himself:—

“That did not better for his life provide  
Than public means which public manners breeds,  
Whence comes it that his name receives a brand”—

who has forfeited a shining place in the world's eye by

devotion to his art, and who, turned adrift on the ocean of life in the leaky carcass of a boat, has shipwrecked on that Fortunate Island (as men always do who find their true vocation) where he is absolute lord, making all the powers of Nature serve him, but with Ariel and Caliban as special ministers? Of whom else could he be thinking when he says:—

“Graves, at my command,  
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let them forth,  
By my so potent art?”

—“Among my Books. Shakespeare Once More,”  
pp. 191-192.

The above is surely a very fair and discriminating interpretation of the allegory; but in the humble opinion of the writer it stands in need of certain correction and amendment. That Prospero is the embodiment of imagination is true in one sense, but not in another. He is here not the embodiment of the artistic, but of the scientific imagination. The rôle of art in the person of Prospero has fallen from Shakespeare, and he has donned the mantle of pure knowledge or science.

Nor is Ariel, strictly speaking the impersonation of pure fancy, but rather that of the scientific spirit, aided and assisted in its duties by the fanciful imagination of Prospero himself—a spirit which humanity in the person of Prospero, has taken prisoner and subdued to the purposes of its will.

Shakespeare, as has been observed is no prophet; but in the person of Ariel, and in the powers conferred upon him, he has unconsciously anticipated many recent scientific discoveries.

Ariel can go from one place to another in almost an instant of time, so can man, and man's thoughts in these days—by means of telegraphy, telephony, and the various methods of locomotion,

Ariel could sing songs, though himself invisible ; and so can man now by the means of various mechanical contrivances. Ariel could control the winds and the waves, and could raise or abate a storm ; humanity is not as yet quite equal to that, but who knows but that in the near future our modern Prosperos may not discover Ariels of their own with powers equal to, and possibly even surpassing this obedient servant of Prospero himself.

No, Ariel is not the embodiment of pure fancy, as Professor Lowell would have us suppose, but he is the embodiment of the hidden powers of Nature, which man has for ages endeavoured to liberate and make the servants of his will.

Hitherto this spirit has been hidden and almost entirely concealed in the surrounding darkness and obscurity, confined as was Ariel, by the witch Sycorax in the cloven pine. Slowly but surely its liberation is being effected, and its power made more and more available for the service of humanity by our modern Prosperos ; though, as the realm of knowledge is ubiquitous and never ending, its liberation can never be complete, or its wonder-working capacity entirely exhausted and subdued.

The following dialogue between Prospero and Ariel will quite bear the strain of, and sustain this interpretation :—

“ *Ari.* Is there more toil ? Since thou dost give me pains.

Let me remember thee what thou hast promised,  
Which is not yet performed me.

*Pros.* How now ? moody ?  
What is't thou canst demand ?

*Ari.* My liberty.

*Pros.* Before the time be out ? no more !

*Ari.* I prithee,  
Remember I have done thee worthy service ;  
Told thee no lies, made no mistakings, serv'd

Without or grudge or grumblings : thou didst promise  
To bate me a full year.

*Pros.* Dost thou forget  
From what a torment I did free thee ?

*Ari.* No.

*Pros.* Thou dost ; and think'st it much to tread the ooze  
Of the salt deep,  
To run upon the sharp wind of the north,  
To do me business in the veins o' th' earth  
When it is bak'd with frost.

*Ari.* I do not, sir.

*Pros.* Thou liest, malignant thing ! Hast thou forgot  
The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy  
Was grown into a hoop ? hast thou forgot her ?

*Ari.* No, sir.

*Pros.* Thou hast. Where was she born ? speak ; tell me.

*Ari.* Sir, in Argier.

*Pros.* O, was she so ? I must  
Once in a month recount what thou hast been,  
Which thou forgett'st. This damn'd witch Sycorax,  
For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible  
To enter human hearing, from Argier,  
Thou know'st, was banish'd : for one thing she did  
They would not take her life. Is not this true ?

*Ari.* Ay, sir.

*Pros.* This blue-ey'd hag was hither brought with child,  
And here was left by the sailors. Thou, my slave,  
As thou report'st thyself, wast then her servant ;  
And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands,  
Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee,  
By help of her more potent ministers,  
And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine ; within which rift  
Imprison'd, thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years ; within which space she died,  
And left thee there ; where thou didst vent thy groans  
As fast as mill-wheel strike. Then was this island—  
Save for the son that she did litter here,  
A freckled whelp hag-born—not honour'd with  
A human shape.

*Ari.* Yes, Caliban her son.

*Pros.* Dull thing, I say so ; he, that Caliban,  
Whom now I keep in service. Thou best know'st  
What torment I did find thee in ; thy groans  
Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts  
Of ever-angry bears : it was a torment  
To lay upon the damn'd, which Sycorax  
Could not again undo : it was mine art,  
When I arriv'd and heard thee, that made gape  
The pine, and let thee out.

*Ari.* I thank thee, master.

*Pros.* If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,  
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till  
Thou'st howl'd away twelve winters.

*Ari.* Pardon, master :  
I will be correspondent to command,  
And do my spriting gently."

It will be observed that in this dialogue Ariel is cold towards Prospero, precisely as science is cold towards man. Ariel is reluctant at first to do the bidding of Prospero. Science is never in a hurry to yield up her secrets to the curiosity of man. Ariel will only serve Prospero under pressure, science is the same. There is no love in Ariel. Science knows neither forgiveness nor love.

Surely Lowell is right in identifying Prospero with Shakespeare. The epilogue to the play, which there is no reason to doubt is from the pen of Shakespeare himself, or written at his dictation, and which throws considerable light on the whole piece, is as follows:—

#### "EPILOGUE

*Spoken by PROSPERO*

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own,—  
Which is most faint : now, 'tis true,  
I must be here confin'd by you,  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
Since I have my dukedom got,  
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island by your spell ;  
But release me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands :  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please : now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant ;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free."



Shakespeare, in the person of Prospero, is here by confession beginning to feel the pressure of age and exhaustion, consequent on an active—in more ways than one—and laborious life. He is in the sere and yellow leaf, and he recognises the fact that his powers are deserting him :—

“ Now my charms are all o'erthrown.”

In other words, his mine is worked out, and his genius is departing :—

“ And what strength I have's mine own— ”

He has earned his rest, and is entitled to dedicate it to contemplation and repose.

He wishes to be sent to Naples—that is, back to his old home at Stratford :—

“ But release me from my bands— ”

Let me depart with your blessing and in peace.

And he goes on to add—and these words are perhaps more significant than any :—

“ And my ending is despair  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.”

In other words, Shakespeare is weary of the world and its ways. The romp, riot, and limelight attendant on a long and arduous, literary, artistic, and theatrical career are beginning to tell upon him and make themselves felt, and he longs to be relieved of them once and for all.

It will be remembered that there were two sides to Shakespeare's complex character—the practical and the contemplative. The practical he has worked out and exploited ; it is now the turn for contemplation. This mood was on him before. We have seen it in *Hamlet*, and we have seen it in Jacques.

But now the decision is final ; contemplation has got



the upper hand. Like Prospero in the play he has doffed the trappings and mantle of his art, and withdraws altogether from the scene.

These changes of mood in Shakespeare have been happily commented on by Hallam, the historian, in the following passage:—

“When his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world and his own conscience; the memory of hours misspent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man’s worsen nature which intercourse with unworthy associates by choice or circumstances peculiarly teaches, these as they sank down into the depth of his great mind seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear or Timon, but that of one primary character—the censurer of mankind. This type is first seen in the philosophic melancholy of Jacques, gazing with an undiminished serenity and with a gaiety of fancy, though not of manners, on the follies of the world. It assumes a graver cast in the exiled Duke of the same play, and next one rather more severe in the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. In all these, however, it is merely contemplative philosophy. In Hamlet this is mingled with the impulses of a perturbed heart under the pressure of extraordinary circumstances; it shines no longer, as in the former characters, with a steady light, but plays in fitful coruscations amidst feigned gaiety and extravagance. In Lear it is the flash of sudden inspiration across the incongruous imagery of madness; in Timon it is obscured by the exaggeration of misanthropy.”

But man and mankind doubtless remained to the last the one inexhaustible subject of interest to Shakespeare, as it did to Montaigne.

Possibly Shakespeare had some idea that his life would not be very prolonged, for he says, "Every third thought shall be my grave," and he desires to relieve himself by prayer—surely a complete answer to the charge that Shakespeare was a pagan and a materialist.

But to turn from the question of enigma and the inner and allegorical meaning of the play, whatever that may be, to the play itself, regarded merely as a verbal and pictorial representation. It still stands isolated and unique. In it Shakespeare has lost but little of his fibre, and none of his constructive art.

His pulse is as steady and perhaps steadier than before but it is not so full. We miss the rich warmth of passion and much of the fiery energy discoverable in *King Lear* and other plays.

Shakespeare is still mortal he has not yet attained immortality, he is in the transitional stage of philosophical aloofness and abstraction.

He is still among men, but no longer of them as of yore. He is more impersonal. He regards his fellow-men as it were from a height, and the height confers on him a truer perspective of their thoughts and actions. He has reached, as Dowden says, "An altitude of thought from which he can survey the whole of human life and see how small and yet how great it is." He has nothing but pity and forgiveness for the greatest of human transgressors and transgressions. There is a well-known French saying that, "To know everything is to forgive everything." Shakespeare is in that humour here. As becomes the advanced knowledge and wisdom of old age—and if wisdom is the grey hair unto men, then Shakespeare was very old indeed—he is all pity and forgiveness.

In the person of Prospero he seems to say :—"Well,

I suppose all these people are a bad lot ; but it is not for me to judge them, or to decide what trick of fate, what dose of original sin, what limitations, or environment, placed them on the wrong path, or set in action their various wayward and erroneous proclivities : so, for my part, I forgive them all." But, he adds : "Do not repeat your offences" :—

"*Pros.* Though with their high wrongs, I am struck to  
the quick,  
Yet, with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part : the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance ; they being penitent.  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further."

The art displayed in the construction of the piece is lighter, more symmetrical, and in a way more scientific than elsewhere. It has not the massive and colossal grandeur of *King Lear*. Thought is preponderant. "The preponderance of thought in *The Tempest*," says Schlegel, "exhibited in its profound and original characterisation, strikes us at once."

The unities of time and space are studiously preserved—that is, the incidents all take place almost at the same time and in the same spot. Whereas in plays like *The Winter's Tale*, *Henry VI.*, and many others, they are utterly disregarded, and we find ourselves, now in one country and now in another, now at peace and now at war.

The play of *The Tempest*, as befits its title, opens with a storm. Like the month of March, it comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb, and any one who has ever been at sea, even in a moderate gale, will recognise the strength and accuracy of the description of the storm, the noise and rattle, the general confusion, and the feeling of uneasiness, excitement, and fear.

Whenever Shakespeare has occasion to treat of the

sea, which he frequently has, it is nearly always in a gale. There is a gale in *Twelfth Night*, in *The Winter's Tale*, and in *Pericles*, and it will be remembered that in *The Merchant of Venice* all Antonio's merchant ships were lost in a storm.

Perhaps the recollection of the storm-tossed ships of the Spanish Armada, which perished not so many years before, was still fresh in Shakespeare's mind, or it may have been that a still more recent great storm, which dispersed a fleet under Sir George Somers and Sir Thomas Gates, was still fresh in his memory.

Shakespeare would probably have agreed with Dr Johnson when he said that life in a ship was like life in a gaol, with a chance of drowning.

The question naturally suggests itself, Had Shakespeare ever seen the sea? Probably, but it is quite within the bounds of possibility that he had not.

Our ancestors as a whole were confirmed landmen, and hated the sea as heartily as any Frenchman.

Defoe made Robinson Crusoe ashamed of his deplorable tendencies to a sea-faring life.

There are thousands of middle-aged and well-to-do people this day in England who have never seen the sea, and the class must have been much more numerous in Shakespeare's times.

But to set over against this, we must remember that the age, and stirring events of Elizabeth's reign gave an enormous impetus to a sea-faring life. The sea in those days was the coming element, as the air is now, on which the activities of the world were to be concentrated more and more, and many of its hardest battles fought out.

Moreover, the accuracy of touch in so many of Shakespeare's descriptions almost precludes the possibility of their being anything else than the result of

first-hand and personal observation. In *The Winter's Tale*, he says:—

“ Now the ship boring the moon with her main-mast and anon swallowed with yeast and froth.”

Surely no one but an eye-witness could have written that.

It has been suggested that Shakespeare visited Italy, but that is merely a surmise, and there is no evidence to support it. But, as Shakespeare himself says, some people will lap up suggestions as a cat laps milk.

The piece has its origin in Italy. Alfonso is the King of Naples, with a son Ferdinand, heir to his throne. Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan, with a brother Antonio, who has usurped his possessions. How that usurpation was effected, and how Prospero finds himself in a desert island alone with his daughter Miranda, cannot be better told than in Shakespeare's own words, which he puts into the mouth of Prospero when relating the history of his adventures and misfortunes to his daughter:—

“ *Mir.* O the heavens !  
What foul play had we, that we came from thence ?  
Or blessèd was't we did ?

*Pros.* Both, both, my girl :  
By foul play, as thou say'st, were we heav'd thence ;  
But blessedly help hither.

*Mir.* O, my heart bleeds  
To think o' the teen that I have turn'd you to,  
Which is from my remembrance ! Please you, further.

*Pros.* My brother, and thy uncle, call'd Antonio,—  
I pray thee, mark me,—that a brother should  
Be so perfidious !—he whom, next thyself,  
Of all the world I lov'd, and to him put  
The manage of my state ; as, at that time,  
Through all the signiories it was the first,  
And Prospero the prime duke ; being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal arts  
Without a parallel : those being all my study,  
The government I cast upon my brother,  
And to my state grew stranger, being transported  
And rapt in secret studies. Thy false uncle—  
Dost thou attend me ?

*Mir.* Sir, most heedfully.

*Pros.* Being once perfected how to grant suits,  
How to deny them, who t'advance, and who  
To trash for over-topping,—new created  
The creatures that were mine, I say, or chang'd 'em,  
Or else new-form'd 'em ; having both the key  
Of officer and office, set all hearts i' the state  
To what tune pleas'd his ear ; that now he was  
The ivy which had hid my princely trunk,  
And suck'd my verdure out on't. Thou attend'st not.

*Mir.* O, good sir, I do.

*Pros.* I pray thee, mark me.  
I, thus neglecting wordly ends, all dedicated  
To closeness, and the bettering of my mind  
With that which, but by being so retir'd,  
O'er-priz'd all popular rate, in my false brother  
Awak'd an evil nature ; and my trust,  
Like a good parent, did beget of him  
A falsehood, in its contrary as great  
As my trust was ; which had indeed no limit,  
A confidence sans bound. He being thus lorded,  
Not only with what my revenue yielded,  
But what my power might else exact,—like one  
Who having into truth, by telling of it,  
Made such a sinner of his memory,  
To credit his own lie,—he did believe  
He was indeed the duke ; out o' the substitution,  
And executing th' outward face of royalty,  
With all prerogative :—hence his ambition growing,—  
Dost thou hear ?

*Mir.* Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.

*Pros.* To have no screen between this part he play'd  
And him he play'd it for, he needs will be  
Absolute Milan. Me, poor man, my library  
Was dukedom large enough : of temporal royalties  
He thinks me now incapable ; confederates—  
So dry he was for sway—with the King of Naples  
To give him annual tribute, do him homage,  
Subject his coronet to his crown, and bend  
The dukedom, yet unbow'd,—alas, poor Milan !—  
To most ignoble stooping.

*Mir.* O the heavens !

*Pros.* Mark his condition, and th' event ; then tell me  
If this might be a brother.

*Mir.* I should sin  
To think but nobly of my grandmother :  
Good wombs have borne bad sons.

*Pros.* Now the condition.  
This King of Naples, being an enemy  
To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit ;  
Which was, that he, in lieu o' the premises,—



Of homage, and I know not how much tribute,—  
Should presently extirpate me and mine  
Out of the dukedom, and confer fair Milan,  
With all the honours, on my brother ; whereon  
A treacherous army levied, one midnight  
Fated to the practice, did Antonio open  
The gates of Milan ; and i' the dead of darkness,  
The ministers of the purpose hurried thence,  
Me and thy crying self.

*Mir.* Alack, for pity !  
I, not remembering how I cried out then,  
Will cry it o'er again ; it is a hint,  
That wrings mine eyes to't.

*Pros.* Hear a little further,  
And then I'll bring thee to the present business  
Which now's upon's ; without which, this story  
Were most impertinent.

*Mir.* Wherefore did they not  
That hour destroy us ?

*Pros.* Well demanded, wench :  
My tale provokes that question. Dear, they durst not,—  
So dear the love my people bore me,— nor set  
A mark so bloody on this business ; but  
With colours fairer painted their foul ends.  
In few, they hurried us aboard a bark,  
Bore us some leagues to sea ; where they prepar'd  
A rotten carcase of a boat, not rigged,  
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast ; the very rats  
Instinctively had quit it : there they hoist us  
To cry to the sea that roar'd to us ; to sigh  
To the winds, whose pity, sighing back again,  
Did us but loving wrong.

*Mir.* How came we ashore ?

*Pros.* By Providence divine.  
Some food we had, and some fresh water that  
A noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,  
Out of his charity, did give us with  
Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessities,  
Which since have steaded much ; so, of his gentleness,  
Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me,  
From my own library."

Prospero is the Providence of the piece and the controlling agent throughout. Every other character in the play, the whole shipwrecked company, Ariel himself, and the monster Caliban, are all subject to the dominion of his will and power. And this power he had attained by a life of rectitude and profound study.



The love of Miranda for Ferdinand is quite natural. It is the love of Eve for Adam, the love of ignorance, innocence, and discovery, not the love of knowledge and experience. She had never seen a man before, and naturally exclaims at his sight:—

“*Mir.* I might call him a thing divine :  
For nothing natural, I ever saw so noble.”

Ferdinand's enchantment is equally great:—

“*Ferd.* O, you wonder !—  
If you be maid or no.  
*Mir.* No wonder, sir, but certainly a maid.”

Later in the play they are discovered playing chess. And this is the only time the game is mentioned in Shakespeare. The word is not in the text itself, but is part of a headline which the playwrights themselves may have inserted.

Shakespeare rarely alludes to games of any sort. Tennis is mentioned occasionally, football once, quoits three times, and the following words in the present play:—

“The putter-out on five for one,”

could very easily be appropriated by the enthusiastic and imaginative golfer. Cleopatra also speaks of billiards.

There are several well-known and pretty songs for which Ariel is chiefly responsible.

“*ARIEL sings.*

*Full fathom five thy father lies ;  
Of his bones are coral made ;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes ;  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell :  
(Burden, within. Ding-dong.)  
Hark ! now I hear them,—Ding-dong, bell.”*

*" Where the bee sucks, there suck I :  
 In a cowslip's bell I lie :  
 There I couch when owls do cry.  
 On the bat's back I do fly  
 After summer merrily.  
 Merrily, merrily shall I live now  
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."*

*" While you here do snoring lie,  
 Open-ey'd conspiracy  
 His time doth take.  
 If of life you keep a care,  
 Shake off slumber, and beware :  
 Awake, Awake !"*

Shakespeare was a better prophet than he knew.

Knowledge is power, as the discoveries of the age reveal every day. More and more it has enabled man to liberate, control, and divert to his own uses the hitherto confined and reluctant powers of Nature, and that control becomes more complete as time goes on.

The individual man may possibly never possess an individual Ariel like the Ariel of Prospero, but collective humanity may be master of even greater agents than he.

But Prospero himself becomes weary of the exercise of his powers, for he says :—

*" Pros. But this rough magic  
 I here abjure ; and, when I have requir'd  
 Some heavenly music,—which even now I do,—  
 To work mine end upon their senses, that  
 This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I'll drown my book."*

In a similar way Shakespeare is weary of his art, and longs for "heavenly music."

He, too, has by this time an unsettled fancy boiled within his skull. So like Prospero he throws down his staff, or passes it on to his beautiful daughter Miranda, and gives her in wedlock to a wealthy prince

of the world that they may extend his kingdom if they can.

Let us conclude with that grand passage, in which Prospero foresees the dissolution of all material things. Part of it forms a fitting epitaph on his own effigy in Westminster Abbey, and is also engraved on the walls of a magnificent cave of Purbeck stone at Swanage, which by its formation, grandeur, and embrace seems almost to invite a tempestuous and stormy sea :—

“ *Pros.* Sure, you do look, my son, in a mov’d sort,  
As if you were dismay’d : be cheerful, sir.  
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air :  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a wreck behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on ; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.—Sir, I am vex’d ;  
Bear with my weakness ; my old brain is troubled,  
Be not disturb’d with my infirmity :  
If you be pleas’d, retire into my cell,  
And there repose : a turn or two I’ll walk  
To still my beating mind.”

## CHAPTER XV

### ODDS AND ENDS

THE entire authorship of a few of Shakespeare's plays has been called in question, and the authenticity of portions of others has been the subject of much debate and divergence of opinion among many considerable critics.

Before referring to the subject, it may be as well to bear in mind the state of literature, and especially dramatic literature, at the time. It must be remembered that at any rate as far as letters were concerned, England was but just emerging from a state bordering on barbarism. It was considered an accomplishment for an ordinary man to be able to read and write at all. The playwrights of those days were a comparatively small brotherhood, usually well known to each other, and all working together for a common end; and it was not at all unusual to find several writers at work at the same time on precisely the same theme, either collaborating or working independently. One writer might write one portion of a play, and another, another. Or one writer might write a play, and have it appropriated by a second, who might improve upon it, or alter it as his own preference and genius might dictate. The Law of Copyright was unknown, and, doubtless, there was a good deal of plagiarism and speculation for which there was no

remedy but public opinion or a personal quarrel between the aggrieved parties.

For instance, Robert Greene, a contemporary of Shakespeare, openly accuses him of having appropriated a great deal of his work. He speaks of him as "The only Shakscone in the country," and as "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers," alluding chiefly to the manner in which Shakespeare had employed certain dramas, presumably by Greene and others, as the foundation for his second and third parts of *Henry VI*.

But this appears to have been a common practice, and if Shakespeare did occasionally build on other men's foundations, he invariably raised upon them a structure far surpassing anything the original founders would have been likely to have created, and wherever and whenever he does borrow, he enriches and alters for the better the borrowed material.

There is always a marked character about everything that proceeds from Shakespeare's pen. "His mode of thought," says Collier, "and his style of expression, are so unlike those of any of his contemporaries, that they can never be mistaken."

The pieces under dispute are included in all the modern and accredited editions of the poet. They are the three parts of *Henry VI.*, *Pericles*, *Titus Andronicus*, and certain small portions of *Henry VIII.*, which are not very important or material, and may be left to the exercise of the curious, or neglected altogether.

It is impossible and quite out of place here to go very deeply into the *pros* and *cons* of the controversy that has arisen around the authorship of the above pieces, so the present writer has taken T. Payne Collier for his guide, than whom Shakespeare has no more judicial or illuminating critic.

Malone is perhaps the greatest of his critical predecessors, and it is to Malone that the majority of writers turn for information, and it is on his authority that they are inclined chiefly to rely. But, unfortunately, Collier and Malone are frequently at variance, though not invariably so; but any one who will be at the trouble to read Collier's notes, especially on this particular dispute, cannot fail to be struck by his great learning, his impartial mind, and the convincing and apparently conclusive arguments he adduces in support of any opinion that he makes his own.

Malone is quite convinced that the first part of *Henry VI.* was not written by Shakespeare at all. Collier is equally certain that it was. Malone asserts that the internal evidence is all against it. Collier relies on the external evidence in its favour; and when the evidence of fact comes into collision with the evidence of assumption, it is surely safer to prefer with Collier the evidence of the former to the latter. Collier's contention is, that the first part of *Henry VI.* appeared originally in the collected edition of "Mr William Shakespeare's Comdies, Histories, and Tragedies," put forth under the care of his fellow actors, Heminge and Condell, and that they would never have ventured to appropriate to Shakespeare what had really come from the pen of another.

They were both actors of repute and men of character, and were presenting to the world an important volume. This argument seems unanswerable.

As regards the second and third parts of *Henry VI.*, Malone and Collier seem fairly in agreement.

It appears that prior to the production of these two plays two other plays had been produced, coming possibly from the pen of Marlowe, or more probably from that of Robert Greene. They were entitled respectively :

*The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the Death of the good Duke Humphrey: And the Banishment and Death of the Duke of Suffolk, and the Tragicall End of the proud Cardinall of Winchester, with the notable Rebellion of Jacke Cade: And the Duke of Yorke's first Claime to the Crowne, and The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke, and the Death of the good King Henrie the Sixth with the Contention between the two Houses Lancaster and Yorke.*

One set of critics assert, among them Malone and Collier, that Shakespeare took over bodily these two plays, which for the sake of brevity may be called *The Contention* and *The Tragedie*, enlarged, altered, and made them his own, so to speak, and then reproduced them under the title of the second and third parts of *Henry VI*.

But another large and very respectable body of critics explain the matter in this way; they say that *The Contention* and *The Tragedie* were really earlier works written by Shakespeare himself, and that he merely amended and reproduced under fresh titles his own original productions.

As regards *Titus Andronicus*, it is by general admission one of the very earliest of Shakespeare's plays. Green, the historian, dismisses it at once from the catalogue, for the apparently sole reason that it is unworthy of Shakespeare—a very summary and unsatisfactory method of settling the question.

Collier, as usual, is far more cautious and judicial. He attributes it, or at any rate large portions of it, without hesitation to the poet. "Had it not been," he says, "by our great dramatist, Meres, who was well acquainted with the literature of his time, would not have attributed it to him." So here again the external



evidence is in favour of, the internal all against authenticity.

Certainly, there is very little of the "gentle" Shakespeare about it. It is a violent and revolting piece, nothing but lust and blood, from the first page to the last, unredeemed by the sweet springs of pity, and unadorned by any remarkable orations. But it must be borne in mind that the "blood and thunder" style of drama, which was much in vogue on the stage when Shakespeare began his career, and of which the *Spanish Tragedy of Kidd* is a type, may have induced Shakespeare for once to depart from his natural bent, and to conform to the more unworthy methods of obtaining popularity by endeavouring to meet the tastes of the people with the above play.

However, it is not very material; Shakespeare would be the gainer rather than the loser by its omission from his works, for, as Dowden points out, if it is the work of Shakespeare, it is very un-Shakespearian.

As regards *Pericles*, Collier is of opinion that the larger part of the first three acts were in all probability the work of an inferior dramatist, but that Shakespeare's hands begin distinctly to be seen in the third Act, and afterwards Collier is persuaded that he could extract nearly every line that was not dictated by his great intellect.

The whole idea of the piece is taken from a novel first published in 1576 under the title of "The Patterne of Painful Adventures." The publication is valuable, as it is the only known specimen of the kind of that date in our language.

Dr Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare" in his "Lives of the Poets" is well worth reading, not merely for its critical ability and the light it throws on the composition and merits of Shakespeare's works, but for

its own sake also, as a masterly piece of writing and prose-reasoning.

It is impossible always to be in agreement with a writer like Johnson, trenchant, opinionated, and certain. His very air of infallibility invites disputation and contradiction. With such a writer one cannot be always at one, and to the mind of the writer he makes many observations that appear not only erroneous, but unjust.

In discussing the unities of time, place, and action, he makes one obvious error, due either to ignorance or forgetfulness. Prior to Shakespeare's time, it seems to have been the conventional idea, among authors, poets, and playwrights, that the unities should be strictly preserved. The idea arose from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible.

"The critics hold it impossible that an action of months or years can be possibly believed to pass in three hours ; or that the spectator can suppose himself to sit in the theatre, while ambassadors go and return between distant kings, while armies are levied and towns besieged, while an exile wanders and returns, or till he whom they saw courting his mistress shall lament the untimely fall of his son. The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality."

The answer to that, of course, is that the spectators are supposed to be in their senses, and know from the first act to the last that the stage is only a stage, and the players, players. It would be impossible to write an historical play at all, except of the most limited and restricted description, without violating the unities again and again.

Dr Johnson quite justifies Shakespeare in setting a new precedent, and of violating them altogether

when necessary ; but he says :—"Whether Shakespeare knew the unities, and neglected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, is, I think, impossible to decide and useless to inquire."

Dr Johnson's omnivorous readings, and acute observation, are for once at fault. For if he had read the "Chorus" which opens the play of *Henry V.*, he would have seen not only that Shakespeare was keenly alive to this question of the unities, but that he appreciated the difficulty, and warns his audience to make allowance in their minds for these unavoidable violations of space and time :—

" But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraisèd spirits that have dar'd  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object : can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France ? or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt ?  
O, pardon ! since a crookèd figure may  
Attest an little place a million ;  
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work.  
Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confin'd two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high-uprearèd and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder :  
Piece-out our imperfections with your thoughts ;  
Into a thousand parts divide one man,  
And make imaginary puissance ;  
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth ;—  
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here and there ; jumping o'er times,  
Turning th' accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass : for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history ;  
Who, prologue-like, your humble patience pray,  
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play."

But Shakespeare, as Johnson justly observes, has no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age without scruple, the customs, institutions,

and opinions of another, at the expense, not only of likelihood, but of possibility.

Again, few, we imagine, will agree with Johnson when he says, "that Shakespeare's set speeches are commonly cold and weak": on the contrary, though to modern ears they may sound a little stately and formal, they are not only passionate, but terse and powerful when the occasion demands. And perhaps fewer still will agree with him when he asserts that comedy and not tragedy was Shakespeare's true *rôle*.

But Johnson rightly observes, "That through all the denominations of a drama his mode of composition is the same, an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time and exhilarated at another.

"He made no scruple to repeat the same jest in many dialogues, or to entangle different plots with the same knot of perplexity."

All through his criticism, Dr Johnson makes many weighty and profound observations. What could be better than the following on "natural ability"?—

"But the power of nature is only the power of using to any certain purpose the materials which diligence procures, or opportunity supplies. Nature gives no man knowledge, and when images are collected by study and experience, can only assist in combining or applying them. Shakespeare, however favoured by nature could impart only what he had learned; and as he must increase his ideas, like other mortals by gradual acquisition, he, like them, grew wiser as he grew older, could display life better as he knew it more, and instruct with more efficacy as he was himself more amply instructed.

"There is a vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction which books and precepts cannot confer;

from this almost all original and native excellence proceeds. Shakespeare must have looked upon mankind with perspicacity, in the highest degree curious and attentive. Other writers borrow their characters from preceding writers, and diversify them only by the accidental appendages of present manners ; the dress is a little varied, but the body is the same. Our author had both matter and form to provide ; for, except the characters of Chaucer, to whom I think he is not much indebted, there were no writers in English, and perhaps not many in other modern languages which showed life in its native colours."

The meaning of the following sentence is somewhat of a mystery to the writer. What does Johnson mean in it by the word "quibble"? He gives no illustration of his meaning, so one may fairly ask when and where do these "quibbles" occur which Dr Johnson will have it are so fatal to the whole?

"A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller ; he follows it at all adventures : it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents or enchanting it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra*, for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it."

Perhaps the following observations and explanations of a few remarkable words and phrases used by Shakespeare may not be unacceptable to the reader.

The following are, of course, only a few out of many, but they are rather outstanding and unusual, though some of them of frequent occurrence, and possibly all may not be apprised of their meaning.

Let us begin with the word "mandrake." So many superstitions have grown up round this mysterious piece of vegetation that the very mention of the word almost sends a shudder through the bones. But people must have their mysteries, they are one of the sweets of life. We could not get on without ghosts, and if science could dispel our illusions, we should all of us be very much inclined to expel science.

The well-known aristocratic couplet might very well be parodied as follows in the interest of the mysterious :—

"Let laws, and learning, art and science die,  
But leave us still our old credulity."

To the cold eye of science the mandrake is nothing more than a plant belonging to the order *Salonaciæ*.

It is remarkable for a forked root, which was thought to resemble the human form, and many superstitions were connected with it, such as that it uttered a shriek when torn out of the ground. Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*, speaks of :—

"Shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth."

Some mandrakes torn out of the earth are supposed to produce fatal effects.

It is said sometimes to stupefy. Cleopatra says :—

"Give me to drink mandragora  
That I might sleep out this great gap of time  
My Antony is away."

It was also supposed to produce fecundity in women, and this is the reason why Rachel so earnestly desired to obtain it from Leah, as being very desirous of having children. It is reported that in the province of Pekin in China there is a kind of mandrake so valuable that a pound of that root is worth thrice its weight in silver; for they say it wonderfully restores the sinking spirits of dying persons.

The mandrake which Reuben brought home to his mother are by some called violets, by others lilies, and by others citrons (Gen. xxx. 14-16).

Shakespeare mentions the word "sack" over and over again. If one asked for "sack" in these days, possibly even Whiteley would be unable to supply it; but in the days of Shakespeare it was a universal drink, in short, any dry wine, as Sherry sack, Madeira sack, Canary sack, and Palm sack. It appears to have originated in the Canary Islands. The word is the same as the French *sec*, dry.

Again there is the word "luce," which has two meanings. It is a corruption of *fleur-de-lis*, the white iris.

The French messenger says to the Regent Bedford:—

"Cropped are the flower de luces in your arms;  
Of England's coat one half is cut away."

referring, of course, to the loss of France.

The word also means a full-grown pike. Thus Justice Shallow says:—

"The luce is the fresh fish, the salt fish is an old coat."

The word is derived from the Greek *lukos*, a wolf, meaning the wolf of fishes.

He talks of "apple-johns."

"I am withered like an old Apple-John."

We are told that they will keep for two years, and



are best when shrivelled. They were sometimes called the apples of King John.

In the United States there is a drink called apple-jack, which is apple or cider brandy.

In *The Merchant of Venice* we find the expression "incony Jew." The meaning of the word seems obscure, but that usually attached to it is—mild, gentle, delicate.

He talks of the Parish-top. It appears that in the old days in some villages a public top was kept, which was whipped by the parishioners whenever they were so disposed for the purpose of exercise.

We find innumerable terms borrowed from heraldry, armoury, and the chase. For instance, we find the word "cuisses," which are armour-pieces for the thigh, from the French *cuisse*, the thigh. "Gyves" are either shackles or coverings for the lower part of the legs. Bergonet is a helmet. Joan of Arc is spoken of as "La-Pucelle." The word "ecstasy" is used in *Hamlet* as equivalent to madness itself.

He always dubs his parsons "Sir." Clergymen had at one time "Sir" prefixed to their names. This is not the "sir" of knighthood, but merely a translation of the university word "dominus" given to graduates, as "Dominus Hugh Evans."

There are several anachronisms in Shakespeare, the most noted of which is that of making Hector quote Aristotle. But this little error has its uses, as it is a strong evidence to show that Lord Bacon, at any rate, never wrote *Troilus and Cressida*.

The title *Love's Labour's Lost* is somewhat of a puzzle. The apostrophe over the word "Labour's," makes the title apparently ungrammatical, but it is probably a case of ellipsis, a contraction for "Labour *is* lost."

Shakespeare says in one place :—

"He took his dial from his poke."

In other words, "he took his watch from his pocket."

The watch, as we now have it, was not invented in Shakespeare's time. Watches are said to have been first made at Nuremberg as early as 1477; but they were very imperfect until the invention of the spiral spring about the year 1658. So the poke dial must have been a very clumsy affair.

The exact date of the writing and production of any one of Shakespeare's plays is largely a matter of conjecture, but taking them as a whole, their chronological order, according to the best and most recent authorities, is somewhat as follows. Speaking roughly, they range as regards their composition between the years 1585 and 1612, covering a period of nearly thirty years, commencing with *Venus and Adonis*, and ending with *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. As is natural, those dealing with passionate love come first, followed by the lighter pieces, such as comedies, fantasies, or melodrama, or whatever may be their proper designation, full of the joy, merriment, and affection of Shakespeare's early experiences. Next, in order of time, come the great historical pieces, written when the author was at his prime, and his intellectual powers at their zenith. Then the great tragedies, which convulse the bodies and minds of humanity at the flood, and finally, romances like *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. This is, of course, speaking very generally, as doubtless some plays were written concurrently, and the periods were more or less intermingled, and run, so to speak, backward and forward into one another.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CONCLUSION

IT is impossible to close the works of Shakespeare without endeavouring to picture to oneself once more what manner of man Shakespeare really was. The direct information we have concerning him from the personal observation of his own contemporaries is but slight, but the little that we do possess is all favourable to him. In his early years, a fellow playwright, Chettle, answered Greene's attack on him in words of real affection, "Myself have seen his demeanour no less civil than he, excellent in the quality he professes; besides divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing that approves his art." His partner, Burbage, spoke of him after death as "a worthy friend and fellow," and Jonson handed down the general tradition of his time when he described him as "indeed honest and of an open and free nature." Of course these brief testimonials from a few personal friends do not let us very far into the real nature of the man. A far surer way of arriving at a true estimate of the fundamentals of his character is by a close scrutiny and sustained and impartial study of his own writings. If these writings were of a technical and professional nature, outside, as it were, and alien to humanity as a whole, they would be of very little

value for the purpose, and would carry us but a short distance on the road. But they are not. They deal directly with human nature, and the human heart, in all its varied manifestations, and under all conditions of joy and sorrow, health and sickness, adversity and prosperity. As revealed in these, his nature stands out as joyous, open, and affectionate, supported by an all-embracing and observant sympathy. Shakespeare has been ear-marked as a "Tory and a gentleman." In his deference to constituted office and authority a Tory he certainly was. But in his days there was not much choice open to a man, he had either to obey or perish. In these days there is such a variety of opinion, and such a multiplicity of authority, that the difficulty is to know which to pick and choose from, and before which god to fall down and worship.

That his nature was passionate, pleasure-loving, and imaginative may be readily conceded, and he was probably one of those men more strongly affected by the immediate environment than by the general outlook; and from this many critics have too hastily inferred that his life was dissolute, disorderly, and broken. Surely such are but shallow and false reasoners, and but superficially acquainted with the mechanism that governs the springs of human action and of human thought.

The very many-sidedness and variety of his nature would act as a regulator and balance, and have a tendency to check and act as a drag on the undue predominance or exaltation of any one vice, or for the matter of that, of any one virtue.

His vices and virtues—and probably both of them were sufficiently numerous—would inevitably tend to counterbalance each other.

What stands out so pre-eminently in Shakespeare as revealed in his works is the harmony and balance of his whole nature; and whatever laxity there may have been in his morals or manners, if laxity there were, it cannot be denied that apart from his natural gifts and powers of observation he must have been possessed of enormous industry, and his nature as a whole anchored to a bed-rock of unshakable stability. All his writings reveal and bear indisputable testimony to the fact that his whole being was in sympathy with all that is best, most beautiful, and orderly in the universe, whether he saw it through the vision of Christianity or any other. Certainly he had warmed both hands at the fire of life, and held that a man should have life here and now, and have it more abundantly, rather than lose it in perpetual speculation about and contemplation of a life that is to come.

The thought sometimes suggests itself, would Shakespeare have been successful in any other vocation than in the one he actually adopted? The probability is that he would not. Any set profession with its prolonged and arduous routine would soon have exhausted his nature, or strained to the breaking-point his highly-strung, vital, and imaginative mind. Nor can one imagine his plodding for a life-time through the dreary paths of scientific research, or watching patiently, with his almost explosive vitality, over the ills that flesh is heir to, and the decaying frames, and expiring bodies of men. The law again, with its precedents, its preliminaries, its pedantry, and its prolongation, would have maddened his eager, impatient, and comprehensive mind. A great churchman he might have been, for, like the Church, he dealt with the hearts of men; but there again the perpetual

repetition of its set doctrines and formularies, and its exclusion from the social pleasures and pastimes of lay life, would have cribbed, cabined, and confined his roving and beauty-loving soul. The life of a soldier might have suited him better, but though he loves depicting action in others, his own mind was essentially thoughtful and reflective, and action in his own person might not have become him so well. All the greatest soldiers known to history are possessed of a certain hardness of nature and indifference to humanity as a whole, features quite foreign to Shakespeare's delicate composition. Nor are they, as a rule, men with any great powers of imagination. Doubtless, Cæsar and Napoleon might be quoted to the contrary, but their imagination ranged within a limited area, and was that of the head rather than the heart, the imagination of dominion, conquest, and power, rather than the appreciation of the finer subtleties of passion, beauty, and life.

Shakespeare was fortunate in the choice of his occupation, and more fortunate still in that he recognised early the direction in which his talents were most likely fruitfully to expand.

It is a remarkable fact, and the writer believes it to be correct, that Shakespeare nowhere mentions the word "Bible," though he does occasionally, but only occasionally, make use of the phrase "Holywrit." He frequently refers, indirectly, at any rate, to its doctrines and teaching, and was by no means altogether ignorant of its contents. But a deep student of its pages he certainly was not. What little he did know of them was probably through oral rather than written instruction. This may be attributed to more causes than one. It must be remembered that in his days the Bible was not so accessible to the public as it

is in these. Outside the very churches themselves a full translation of it, if obtainable at all, was probably a great and costly rarity, for it was not until the year 1536—about twenty years before Shakespeare's birth—that the first complete copy of the English Bible, based upon Tyndale's translation and executed by Myles Coverdale, was presented and dedicated to Henry VIII., by whom it was ordered to be placed in every Parish Church in England.

Moreover, the nature of Shakespeare's calling was hardly conducive to Biblical study, and he probably rarely had the opportunity, if he had the inclination, to attend a place of worship.

It must be remembered, moreover, that he lived in an age of transition, and that religious thought and life were passing through a period of convulsion.

He was essentially a child of the Renaissance, one of those rare and beautiful flowers, thrown up at intervals, and at long periods of time, by the very ebullition of Nature herself.

It was fortunate, for English literature, at any rate, that Shakespeare appeared upon the scene at the precise moment that he did. Had he appeared later, his reflective and thoughtful mind might have been dragged into and overpowered by the Puritan net, and English literature would have lost its mightiest and most varied exponent. For had his mind been saturated, like the mind of Milton, with Biblical literature, learning, and lore, his writings must inevitably have taken on an altogether different formation and complexion, different in character, different in tone, different in rhythm, and different, probably, in direction and expression, and the great lay Bible of England—if one may call it so with reverence—would never have been written.



It must also be remembered that in Shakespeare's days two fresh and mighty streams of life were running concurrently, and almost side by side, the Renaissance and the Reformation, at once supplementary and hostile to each other, and both of them almost equally inimical to the spirit of Rome. But they had this in common, they both stood for fresh life and liberty.

The Reformation and its spirit gave Western Christendom the Bible, the Renaissance and its influence the works of Shakespeare.

There is some doubt as to whether John Shakespeare, the father of the poet, belonged to the old or the reformed religion, but as regards the professed faith of the poet himself there can be no doubt whatever, for it cannot be disputed that all the children of John, and among them his son William, were baptized at the ordinary and established place of worship in the parish, and the poet certainly represents the Protestant ideal of a man rather than the Catholic. No Catholic, as has been pointed out, would have spoken of the "evening mass" as Shakespeare does in *Romeo and Juliet*.

The faith of the nation, or rather its outward expression, was undergoing a change, which was probably more gradual in appearance, at any rate, than has generally been supposed, and possibly did not all at once or very intimately affect the life of the parishes themselves.

Neither Henry VIII. nor Elizabeth "created" a new Church. The Reformation made no great break in the continuity of the Church of England, which is the same now in all its essentials as that which existed in the sixth century. The Anglican spirit all down the line of its history has been hostile to the pretensions of the Roman See, and only grudgingly, intermittently,

and with reluctance, admitted its claim to, at any rate, political and temporal allegiance.

England before the Reformation bore much the same relation religiously towards Rome that the colonies of England bear politically to England at this day. That is to say, the bond was loose, and the obedience uncertain and elastic.

Moreover, it is doubtful if the Anglo-Saxon people, taken collectively, or even individually, have ever really absorbed, understood, or appreciated the teaching, atmosphere, and finer doctrines of the true Roman mind. They are foreign to its nature and racial characteristics. To be a true Catholic a man must inherit the Latin blood, or have a large admixture of it in his composition. He must breathe the very air of Rome, and live within the atmosphere of its far-reaching, but by no means universal, environment.

So the Reformation was probably really no great shock to the life of the nation as a whole. It finally and for ever did away with the temporal and spiritual supremacy of the Pope; it threw open the pages of the Bible to all who could appreciate them; it spiritualised certain of its leading doctrines, and abolished the traffic in sales and indulgences, but with these exceptions the Church life of the people went on much the same as before.

It has been necessary to refer to this subject here as Shakespeare has been claimed in some quarters as a Catholic, one gentleman going entirely out of his way to devote a whole book to the subject. But even if it could be proved, which it certainly cannot, that Shakespeare was ever a formal adherent of the Roman faith, can one imagine his great and independent spirit, with its love of liberty and variety, and inhaling eagerly the breath of life from whatever quarter it might come,

bound to the pretensions and fettered by the shackles of a Roman Curia? For, ready though he was to bow down to and acknowledge all legitimate authority in temporal affairs, he was probably the last man to entrust his soul to, or limit his intelligence at the bidding of, any priest of any religion in the world.

What Shakespeare's eschatological ideas of the great beyond may have been, we do not know. There is one very remarkable passage in *Measure for Measure* treating on the subject of death. It reveals but little, and has rather a Dante ring about it:—

“ *Claud.* Ay, but to die, and go we know not where ;  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot ;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod ; and the delightful spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice ;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,  
That blow with restless violence round about  
The pendent world ; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts  
Imagine howling ! 'tis too horrible !  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
To what we fear of death.”

Beyond that, Shakespeare refuses to lift the veil, which covers the hidden secrets of his soul.

He was probably one of those men, and they are countless, who continue in the religion in which they have been nurtured, and who conform throughout life more or less to its teachings and principles, and live and die, in its faith or hope, its love or fear, without enquiring too closely into its credentials, or wrestling very long and arduously with those obstinate questionings of invisible things, the futility of which they probably very early discover.

There are many sayings in his works which corro-

borate and bear out this view, for whenever he has occasion to refer to Christianity, or to speak of the Christian faith, he does so with the beauty, simplicity, and reverence of a child.

The following well-known words from *Hamlet* occur at once to the mind. Referring to Christmas Eve, Marcellus says:—

“ It faded on the crowing of the cock.  
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,  
The bird of dawning singeth all night long :  
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,  
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm  
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.”

And again, in *Richard II.*, the bishop, referring to the death of the banished Duke of Norfolk, says:—

“ And there at Venice gave  
His body to that pleasant country's earth,  
And his pure soul unto his captain, Christ,  
Under whose colours he had fought so long.”

And Clarence says to his murderers in *Richard III.*:—

“ I charge you as you hope to have redemption  
By Christ's dear blood shed for our grievous sins  
That you depart and lay no hands on me :  
The deed you undertake is damnable.”

Moreover, the passage with which his Will opens rather confirms this view. The “will” is short, and was evidently, by the way it enters into detail, written under the immediate supervision and dictation of the poet himself, and his thoughtful nature would have hardly allowed the passage to stand unless he had some faith and hope in its meaning and intent.

At any rate he realised more than most men,

“ That all that live must die,  
Passing through nature to eternity.”

And how better can one close this criticism of the

life and writings of Shakespeare than by reciting those beautiful lines, perhaps as appropriate and beautiful of their kind as any in the English tongue, known as the dirge in *Cymbeline* :—

*“ Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,  
Nor the furious winter’s rages ;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages ;  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.*

*Fear no more the frown o’ the great,  
Thou art past the tyrant’s stroke ;  
Care no more to clothe and eat ;  
To thee the reed is as the oak :  
The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
All follow this, and come to dust.*

*Fear no more the lightning-flash,  
Nor th’ all-dreaded thunder-stone ;  
Fear not slander, censure rash ;  
Thou hast finish’d joy and moan :  
All lovers young, all lovers must  
Consign to thee, and come to dust.*

*No exorciser harm thee !  
Nor no witchcraft charm thee !  
Ghost unlaid forbear thee !  
Nothing ill come near thee !  
Quiet consummation have ;  
And renownèd be thy grave ! ”*

THE END









JP

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